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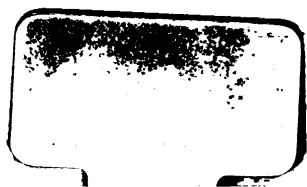
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THE BEAUTIES
OF
THE PRAYER-BOOK.



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PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1876.

Price Sixpence.

13083. 2. 30

LONDON:

PRINTED BY C. W. REYNOLDS, LITTLE IULTENEY STREET,
HAYMARKET, W.

THE
BEAUTIES OF THE PRAYER-BOOK.

MORNING PRAYER.

“**H**ABIT is second nature,” saith a wise old saw, so it must be from custom that it has become natural to Church people to repeat placidly, week after week, the same palpable self-contradictions and absurdities. A sensible, shrewd man of business puts away his papers on the Saturday night, and apparently locks his mind up with them in his desk; certain it is that he

“Goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,”

and yet never discovers that his boys are repeating the most contradictory responses, while the parson is enunciating as axioms the most startling propositions.

When the preliminary silence in church is broken by the “sentences,” the first words that fall from the clergyman’s lips are a distinct declaration of the conditions of salvation: “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive;” and we are further instructed as to our sins, that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” These very plain statements take high and comprehensible ground. God is supposed to desire that man should be righteous, and is therefore naturally satisfied when

"the wicked forsakes his way and the unrighteous man his path." We proceed, then, to confess our sins, and after Mrs. A., whose eyes are straying after her neighbour's bonnet, has confessed that she is erring and straying like a lost sheep, and Mrs. B., who is devising a way to make an old dress look new, has owned plaintively that she is following the devices of her own heart; and Squire C., of the rubicund visage and broad shoulders, has sonorously remarked that there is no health in him, and his son, with the joyous face, has cheerfully acknowledged that he is a miserable sinner—after these very appropriate and reasonable confessions to a Divine Being who "seeth the heart," and may therefore be supposed to take them for what they are worth, have been duly gone through, we are somewhat puzzled to hear the clergyman announce that God "pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, *and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel.*" What is this sudden appendix to the before-declared conditions of salvation? We had been told that if we confessed our sins God's faithfulness and justice would cause him to forgive us; here we have duly done so, and surely the language is sufficiently strong; we are yet suddenly called upon to believe a "holy Gospel" as a preliminary to forgiveness. But we are not yet, to use a colloquialism, out of the wood; for while we are moodily meditating on this infraction of our contract the time slips on unobserved, and, it being a feast-day, we are startled by a stern voice conveying the cheerful intelligence, "Whosoever will be saved, *before all things*, it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." "Before all things?" before repentance? before turning away from our wickedness? before doing that which is lawful and right? And what is this "Faith" which we must keep whole and undefiled

if we would save our souls alive? A bewildering jumble of triplets and units, mingled in inextricable confusion. But as he that "will be saved must thus think of the Trinity," we will try and disentangle the thread of salvation. "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God," says the parson. "They are not three Gods, but one God," shout out the people. We are compelled "to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord," reiterates the parson. "We are forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say there be three Gods or three Lords," obstinately persist the people. Then, after some rather intrusive particulars about the family (and very intricate) relations of the Father to the Son, and of both to the Holy Ghost, we are told that "so"—why *so*?—"there is one Father, not three Fathers, one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts." In so far as we have been able to follow the meaning, or rather the no-meaning, of the preceding sentences, no one said anything about three Fathers, three Sons, or three Holy Ghosts. The definite article *the* had been used in each case with a singular noun. We imagine the clause must have been inserted because all ideas as to the meaning of numerals must have been by this time so hopelessly lost by the congregation, that it became necessary to remark that "the Father" meant one Father, and not three. The list of necessities for salvation is not yet complete, for "furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ." So far, then, from its being true that the wicked man who turns from his sins shall save his soul alive, we find that our sinner must also believe the Gospel, must accept contradictory arithmetical assertions, must think of the Trinity in a way which makes thought a ludicrous impossibility, and must believe *rightly* all the details of the method by which

a Divine Being became a human being. If a sinner chances to go out of church after the first sentence, and from being a drunkard becomes temperate, from being a liar becomes truthful, from being a profligate becomes chaste, and foolishly imagines that he is thereby doing God's will, and thus saving his soul alive, he will certainly, according to the Athanasian Creed, wake up from his pleasant delusion to find himself in everlasting fire. As sceptics, we need offer no opinion as to *which* is right, the creed or the text; we only suggest that *both* cannot be correct, and that it would be more satisfactory if the Church, in her wisdom, would make up her venerable mind which is the proper path, and then keep in it. After all this, we are in no way surprised to learn from a collect that being saved is dependent on quite a new support, namely, on the knowledge we have of God. How many more things may be necessary to salvation it is impossible to say at this point, but the office for Morning Prayer, at any rate, gives us no more. It would be rash to conclude, however, that we have fulfilled all, for the Church has some more scattered up and down her Prayer-Book; the end of all which double-dealing is, that we can never be sure that we have really fulfilled every condition; sad experience teaches us that when the Church says, "do so-and-so, and you shall be saved," she is, meanwhile, whispering under her breath, "provided you also do everything else."

We fail also to see the reasonableness of the constant cry, "for the sake of Jesus Christ," or "through Jesus Christ." We ask that we may lead "a godly, righteous, and sober life" *for His sake*; but this is just what we are told God wishes already, so why should He be asked to grant it for some one else's sake, as though He were unwilling that we should be righteous, and can only be coaxed into allowing us to be so by a favourite son? In the same way we are

to come to God's "eternal joy" through Jesus, which is, by the way, another of these endless conditions of salvation. We ask to be defended from our enemies "through the might of Jesus Christ," as though God Himself was not strong enough for the task; and God is urged to send down His healthful Spirit for the "honour of our advocate and Mediator," although that very advocate told His disciples that God would always give that spirit to those who asked for it. To the outside critic, these continual references to Jesus, as though God grudged all good gifts, appear very dishonouring to the "Father in Heaven."

Is it considered necessary to press God vehemently to hurry himself? "O God, *make speed* to save us. O Lord, *make haste* to help us." Will not God, of His own accord, do things at the best possible time? and further, is it possible for a Divine Being to make haste?

It will, perhaps, be considered hypercritical to object to the versicles: "Give peace in our time, O Lord, *because* there is none other that fighteth for us but only thou, O God." What more do they want than an almighty reinforcement? "None other?" Well, we should have fancied that God *and* somebody else were really more than were needed. At any rate, it sounds very insulting to say to God, "please give us peace, since we cannot count on any assistance except yours."

We have nothing to say about the prayers for the Royal Family, except that they do not show any very attractive results, and that it must have much edified George IV. to hear himself spoken of as a "most religious and gracious king." Never surely was a family so much prayed for, but *cui bono*? If the "Bishops, Curates, and all congregations" truly please God, he is about the only person that they succeed in pleasing, for the Bishops abuse the clergy, and the clergy abuse the Bishops, and the congregations abuse both.

8 *The Beauties of the Prayer-Book.*

Of the last prayer, we must note the exceeding failure of the petition to grant the Church knowledge of truth, and we cannot help marvelling why, if they really desire to know the truth, they so invariably frown at and endeavour to crush out every earnest search after truth, every effort for clearer light. Of all things that can happen to the Church, the knowledge of the truth would be the least "expedient for" her, for she would fade away before the sunshine of truth as ghosts are said to fly at the cockcrow which announces the dawn.

A criticism on the office of Morning Prayer is scarcely complete without a few words upon the canticles appointed to be daily sung by the faithful to the glory of God. Anything more ludicrously absurd than these from the lips of our congregations it would indeed be difficult to imagine. The *Venite* (Ps. xcvi.) is the first we are called upon to take part in, and the first shock comes when we find ourselves chanting "The Lord is a great God and a *great king above all gods*." "Above all gods!" what terrible heresy have we been unwittingly committing ourselves to? Is there not only one God—or, at least, it may be three—but, if three, they are co-equal, and no one is above the other; who are these "all gods" that "the Lord" is "king above?" We remember for a moment that when this psalm was written the gods of the nations around Israel were believed to have a real existence, and that, therefore, it was no inconsistency in the mouth of the Hebrew to rejoice that his national god was ruler above the gods of other peoples. This explanation is reasonable, but then it does not explain why we, who believe not in this multiplicity of deities, should pretend that we do. Our equanimity is not restored by the next phrase, "In his hand are all the corners of the earth;" but the earth is a globe, and has no corners. A misty remembrance floats through our mind of Iræneus stating that there were four gospels be-

cause there were four corners to the earth and four winds that blew; but since his time things have changed, and the corners have been smoothed off. Is it quite honest to say in God's praise a thing which we know to be untrue, and must we be unscientific because we are devotional? We then hear about our fathers being forty years in the wilderness, although we know that they were not there at all, unless the people—generally looked upon as amiable lunatics—are correct, who assert that the English nation is descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel. Why should we pretend to God that we are Jews, when both He and we know perfectly well that we are nothing of the kind? We come to the *Te Deum*, said to have been composed by S. Ambrose for the baptism of S. Augustine:—"To thee cherubin and seraphin continually do cry." Putting aside the manifest weariness both to God and to the cryers of the never-ceasing repetition of these words, and the degrading idea of God implied in the thought that it gives Him any pleasure to be perpetually assured of His holiness, as though it were a doubtful matter—we cannot help inquiring, "Who are these cherubin and seraphin?" According to the Bible, they are six-winged creatures, who cover their faces with two wings, and their feet with two more, and fly with the remaining pair: they may be seen in pictures of the ark, balancing themselves on their feet-covering wings, and preventing themselves from falling by steadying each other with another pair. "Lord God of Sabaoth," or "of Hosts;" is this a reasonable name for one supposed to be a "God of peace?" The elder Jewish and the Christian ideas of God here come into direct collision: according to one, "the Lord is a man of war" (Ex. xv.), while the other represents him as "the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." (Isai. ix.) The *Te Deum* midway changes the object of its song, and addresses itself to the Son instead

of to the Father. How far this is permissible is much disputed, for certain it is that in the early ages of Christianity prayer was addressed to the Father *only*, and that one of the Fathers* sharply rebukes those who pray to the Son, since they thereby deprive the Father of the honour due to Him alone. How this can be, when Father and Son are one, we do not pretend to explain. Then ensue those curious details regarding Christ which we shall touch upon in dealing later with the Apostles' Creed. We find ourselves, presently, asking to be kept "this day without sin;" yet, we are perfectly well aware, all the time, that God will do nothing of the kind, and that all Christians believe that they sin every day. Why does the Church teach her children to sing this in the morning, and then prepare a "confession" for the evening, unless she feels perfectly sure that God will pay no attention to her prayer? The wearisome reiteration in the *Benedicite* is so thoroughly recognised that it is very seldom heard in the church, while the *Benedictus* (Luke i.) is open to the same charge of unreality as is the *Venite*, that it is a song for Jews only. Many other faults and absurdities might be pointed out which disfigure Morning Prayer, even if the whole idea of prayer be left untouched. The prayers of the Prayer-Book are dishonouring to God from their childishness, their unreality, their folly, their conflict with sound knowledge. Allowing that prayer may be reasonable, these prayers are unreasonable; allowing that prayer may be reverent, these prayers are irreverent; allowing that prayer may be sincere, these prayers are insincere. They are fragments of an earlier age transplanted into the present, and they are as ludicrous as would be men walking about in our streets to-day clad in the armour of the Middle Ages, the ages of Darkness and of Prayer.

* Origen.

EVENING PRAYER.

The Church, in her wisdom, fearing that the quaint conceits and impossibilities which we have referred to, the—

“Jewels which adorn the spouse
Of the eternal glorious King,”

should not be sufficiently appreciated and admired by her children, if presented to their adoration once only on every day, has appointed for the use of the faithful an office of Evening Prayer, which, in its main features, is identical with that which is to be “said or sung” each morning. Sentences, address, confession, absolution, Lord’s Prayer, and versicles, are all exactly reproduced, and Psalms and Lessons follow in due course, varying from day to day. To take the whole Psalter, and analyse it, would be a task too long for our own patience, or for that of our readers, so we only pick out a few salient absurdities, and ask why English men and women should be found singing sentences which have no beauty to recommend them, and no meaning to dignify them. We will not lay stress on the quaintness of a congregation standing up and gravely singing: “Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns, so let indignation vex him, even as a thing that is raw” (Ps. lviii.); we will not ask what the clergyman means where he reads out to his congregation: “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove.” (Ps. lxxviii.) These are isolated passages, which a pen might erase, retaining the major part of the Psalter: we go further, and challenge it as a whole, asserting that it is ludicrously inappropriate as a song-book for sensible people, even although those people may be desirous of praying to, or praising God. Our strictures are here levelled, not at prayer *as* prayer, but simply at this particular form of prayer. In the first place the Psalter is written only for a single nation; it is full of local

allusions, and of references to Israelitish history, which are only reasonable in the mouth of a Jew. With what amount of sense can an English congregation every 15th evening of the month sing such a Psalm as the lxxviii., recounting all the marvels of the plagues and of the exodus, or on the following day plead with God to help them, because "the heathen are come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy temple have they defiled, and made Jerusalem an heap of stones?" (Ps. lxxix.) Is there any respect to God in telling him that "we are become an open shame to our enemies; a very scorn and derision unto them that are round about us" (v. 4), when, as a matter of simple fact, the speakers are become nothing of the kind? Can it be thought to be consistent with reverence to God to make these extraordinary assertions in praying to Him, and then to base upon them the most urgent pleas for His immediate aid? for we find the congregation proceeding: "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy Name; O deliver us and be merciful unto our sins for Thy Name's sake. . . . O let the vengeance of Thy servant's blood which is shed be openly shewed upon the heathen in our sight. O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee; according to the greatness of Thy power, preserve Thou those that are appointed to die" (vv. 9, 10, 11). Now in all sober seriousness what does this mean? Is this addressed to God, or is it not? If it be, is it right and fit to address to him words that are absolutely untrue, and to cry urgently for aid which is not required, and which He cannot possibly give? If it be not, is it decent to solemnly sing or read phrases seemingly addressed to God, but really not intended to be noticed by him, phrases which use His name as though an appeal to Him were seriously made? It cannot be healthy to juggle thus with words, and to make emotional prayers which are utterly devoid of all meaning. Some devout persons talk very freely about the wicked-

ness of blasphemy, but is not that kind of game with God, in wailings which are devoid of reality, appeals not intended to be answered, a far more real blasphemy in the mouth of any one who believes in Him as a hearer of prayer, than the so-called blasphemy of those who distinctly assert that to them the popular and traditional "God" is a phantom, and that they see no reason to believe in His existence? Passing from this graver aspect of the use of the Psalter as a congregational song-book, we notice how purely comic many of the psalms would appear to us, had not the habit-fashion of our lives accustomed us to repeat them in a parrot-like manner, without attaching the smallest meaning to the words so glibly recited. "Every night wash I my bed and water my couch with my tears" (Ps. vi.), is sung innocently by laughing maiden and merry youth, the bright current of whose life is undimmed by the shadow of grief. "Bring unto the Lord, O ye mighty, bring young rams unto the Lord" (Ps. xxix.), is solemnly read out by the country clergyman, who would be beyond measure astonished if his direction were complied with. There we find the congregation making the certainly untrue assertion: "Moab is my wash-pot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; Philistia, be thou glad of me." (Ps. lx.) At another time they cry out, "O clap your hands together, all ye people" (Ps. xlvii.); they speak of processions which have no existence, "The singers go before, the minstrels follow after, in the midst are the damsels playing on the timbrels." (Ps. lxxviii.) Another phase of this Psalter, which is offensive rather than comic, is the habit of swearing and cursing which pervades it; we find Christians, who are bidden to love their enemies, and to bless them that curse them, pouring out curses of the most fearful character, and displaying the most reckless hatred: "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his footsteps in the blood of the

ungodly." (Ps. lviii.) "Let them fall from one wickedness into another, and not come into Thy righteousness (Ps. lxix.);" a nice prayer, truly, for one man to pray for his brother man, to a holy God who is supposed to desire righteousness in man. Then there is that fearful imprecation in Psalm cix., too long to quote, where the vindictive and cruel anger not only curses the offender himself, but passes on to his children, "Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion upon his fatherless children." Of course people do not really mean any of these terrible things which they repeat day after day; humanity is too noble to wish to draw down such curses from heaven, the people have outgrown the bad spirit of that cruel age when the Psalter was written, and their hearts have grown more loving; but surely it is not well that men and women should stand on a lower level in their prayers than in their lives; surely the moments, which ought to be the noblest, should not be passed in using language which the speakers would be ashamed of in their daily lives; surely the worship of the Ideal should not be degraded below the practice of the Real, or the notion of God be less lofty than the life of man. By making their worship an unreality, by being less than true in their religious feelings, by using words they do not mean, and by pretending emotions they do not experience, people become trained into insincerity, and lose that rare and beautiful virtue of instinctive and thorough honesty. When the prayer does not echo the yearning of the heart, then the habit grows of not making the word really the representative of the thought, of not making the feeling the measure of the expression. Much of the cant of the day, much of the social insincerity, much of the prevalent unreality, may be laid at the door of this crime of the Churches, of making men speak words which are meaningless to the speaker, and of teaching them to be untrue in the moments which should be the truest

and the purest. At another time, we might impeach prayer as a whole; we might argue against it, either as opposed to the unchangeableness and the wisdom of God, if a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God be believed in, or as utterly futile, and proved worthless by experience. But here we only plead for sincerity in prayer, wherever prayer is practised; we only urge that at least the prayer shall be sincere, and that the lips shall obey the heart.

Exactly the same objection applies to the "Canticles," which, in modern lips, are absolutely devoid of sense. What meaning has the "song of the blessed Virgin Mary" from an ordinary English congregation; why should English people talk about God promising His mercy "to our forefathers, Abraham, and his seed for ever," when Abraham is not their forefather at all? Why should they ask God to let them "depart in peace," when they have not the smallest desire to depart at all, and why should they assert to Him that they "have seen Thy salvation," when they have seen nothing of the kind? For the perpetually recurring *Gloria*, one cannot help wondering what it means; when was "the beginning," and is the "it" which was at that period, the "glory" which is wished to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; further, what is the good of wishing glory to Him—or to Them—if He—or They—have always had, and always will have it? When we have heard a congregation reciting the Creed, we have sometimes wondered what meaning they attached to it. "The maker of heaven and earth." Do people ever try to carry the mind back to the time before this "making," and realise the period when nothing existed? Is it possible to imagine things coming into existence, "something" emerging from where before "nothing" was? And then Jesus, the only Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from Himself, and son, therefore, not of "the Father," but of that spirit

which only exists in and through "the Father and the Son." Again, how can a "spirit" conceive a material body? If the whole affair be miraculous, why try to compromise matters with nature, by making this kind of pseudo-father? Surely it would be simpler to leave it a complete miracle, and let the Virgin remain the solitary parent. Except for making the story match better with the elder Greek mythology, there is no need to introduce a god-parent in the affair; a child without a father is no more remarkable than a mother who remains a virgin. This attempt at reasonableness only makes the whole more outrageously unnatural, and provokes criticism which would be better avoided. A God, who suffered, was crucified, dead, buried, who rose and ascended, is a complete enigma to us. Could He, the impassive, suffer? could He, the intangible, be crucified? could He, the immortal, die? could He, the omnipresent, be buried in one spot of earth, rise from it, and ascend to some place where He was not the moment before? What kind of God is this who is to "come again" to a place where He is not now? If the answer be, that all this refers to the manhood of Jesus, then we inquire, "Is Christ divided?" if He be one God with the Father, then all He did was done by the Father as much as by Himself; if He did it only as man, then God did not come from heaven to save men; then this is not a divine sacrifice at all; then, a simple man cannot have made an atonement for the sin of the world. And where is "the right hand" of Almighty God? Is Jesus sitting at the right hand of a pure spirit, who has neither body nor parts? and, since He is one with God, is He sitting at his own right hand? Such questions as these are called blasphemous; but we fling back the charge of blasphemy on those who try to compel us to recite a creed so absurd. We decline to repeat words which convey to us no meaning, and not ours the fault, if any inquiry

into the meaning produce dilemmas so inconvenient to the orthodox. We are also required to believe in "the" Holy Catholic Church, but we know of no such body. Catholic means universal, and there is no universal church: to believe in that which does not exist would, indeed, be faith without sight. There is the Orthodox Church, but that is anathematised by the Roman; there is the Roman Church, but that is the "scarlet whore of Babylon" in the eyes of the Protestant; there are the Protestant sects, but they are many and not one, a multiformity in disunity. We are asked to acknowledge a "Communion of Saints," and we see those who severally call themselves saints excommunicating each the other: in a "forgiveness of sins," but Nature tells us of no forgiveness, and we find suffering invariably following on the disregard of law; in a "resurrection of the body," but we know that the body decays, that its gases and its juices are transmuted in the alembic of Nature into new modes of existence; in a "life everlasting," when the dark veil of ignorance envelopes the "Beyond the tomb." Only the thoughtless can repeat the creed; only the ignorant cannot see the impossibilities it professes to believe.

The two Collects, which are different in evening prayer to those used in the morning office, call for no special remark, save that they—in common with all prayers—make no practical difference in human life. The devout Christian is no more defended from "all perils and dangers of this night," than is the most careless atheist; wisely, also, does the Christian, having prayed his prayer, walk carefully round his house, and examine the bolts and bars, mindful that these commonplace defences are more likely to be efficacious against burglars than the protecting arm of the Most High.

The remainder of the service is the same as that used in the morning, so calls for no further remark.

If only people would take the trouble of *thinking* about their religion; if only they could be led, or even provoked, into trying to realise that which they say they believe, then the foundations of the popular religion would rapidly be undermined, and the banner of Free Thought would soon float proudly over the crumbling ruins of that which was once a Church.

THE LITANY.

The Litany has a fault which runs throughout the Prayer-Book, that "vain repetition" which, according to the Gospel, was denounced by Jesus of Nazareth; the refrain of "Good Lord, deliver us," and "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord," recurs with wearisome reiteration, and is repeated monotonously by the congregation, few of whom, probably, would know from what they were requesting deliverance, if the clergyman were to stop and ask so unexpected a question. Gods the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are severally besought to have mercy upon the miserable sinners praying to them, and then the Trinity as a whole is asked to do the same. How far this separation is consistent with the unity of the Godhead, and whether, in praying to the Son, we do, or do not, implicitly pray to the Father, and *vice versa*, those only can tell us who understand the "mystery of the Holy Trinity." This preamble over, the remainder of the Litany is addressed to "God the Son," who is the "Good Lord" invoked throughout, in spite of His reproof to the young man who knelt to Him, calling Him "Good Master;" "why callest thou Me good?" Various dogmas are alluded to in the succeeding verses in which few educated people now retain any belief. How many really care to be delivered "from the crafts and assaults of the devil," or believe in the existence of the devil at all? He is one

of those phantoms that can only be found in the darkness, and which fade away when the sun arises. How many believe in the "everlasting damnation," of the same verse, or really consider themselves in the smallest danger of it? No one who believed in hell could pray to be delivered from it in careless accents, for the smallest chance of that awful doom would force a wail of terror from the lightest-hearted of the listeners. Is it consistent to ask Christ to deliver us from His wrath? if He loved men so much as to die for them, it seems as though a great change must have come over His mind since He ascended into heaven, if He really requires to be pressed so urgently not to "take vengeance," and to spare us and deliver us from His wrath. Which is right, the wrath or the love? for they are not compatible; and does God really like to see people crouching before Him in this fashion, praising His mercy while they tremble lest He should "break out" upon them? If we were inclined to be hypercritical we might suggest that the prayer to be delivered from "all uncharitableness" gives a melancholy proof of the inadequacy of prayer; the answer to it may be read weekly in the *Church Times* and the *Rock*, more especially in the clerical contributions. The other petitions are also curiously ineffectual; "from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism," is so manifestly accepted at the Throne of Grace in these rationalising days. Jesus is then adjured to deliver His petitioners by the memory of His days upon earth, and we get the ancient idea of an incarnate God, so common to all eastern religions, and the curious picture of a God who is born, circumcised, baptized, fasts, is tempted, suffers, dies, is buried, rises, ascends. How God can do all this remains a mystery, but these suffering, and then conquering gods are familiar to all readers of mythologies; we learn further, that God the Holy Ghost can come to a place where He was not previously,

although He is the infinite God, and is therefore omnipresent. Verily, it needs that our faith be great. Being delivered sufficiently, the congregation proceed to a number of additional petitions, the first of which is, unfortunately, as great a failure as the preceding ones, for it prays that the Church may be guided "in the right way;" and having regard to the multiplicity of Churches, each one of which goes doggedly in her own particular way, it is manifest that they can't all be right, as they are all different. Then follow prayers for the Royal Family and the Government, and a general request to "bless and keep all Thy people;" a request which is systematically disregarded. In these days of "bloated armaments" it is at least pleasant to dream in church of there being given "to all nations, unity, peace, and concord." The "pure affection" with which God's Word is received is also perfectly imaginary; those who do not believe it criticise and cavil; those who do believe it go to sleep over it. The last part of these verses seems designed simply to pray for everybody all round, and this being satisfactorily accomplished, we come across another trace of an ancient creed: "Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world;" this is a fragment of sun-worship, alluding to the sun-god, when, entering the sign of the Lamb, he bears away all the coldness and the darkness of the winter months, and gives life to the world. The remainder of the Litany is of the same painfully servile character as the earlier portions; God seems to be regarded as a fierce tyrant, longing to wreak His fury on mankind, and only withheld by incessant entreaties. All possible evils seem to be showering down on the congregation, and, if one closed one's eyes, one could imagine a sad-faced, care-worn, haggard group of Covenanters, or Huguenots, instead of the fashionable crowd that fills the pews; and when one hears them ask that they may be "hurt by no

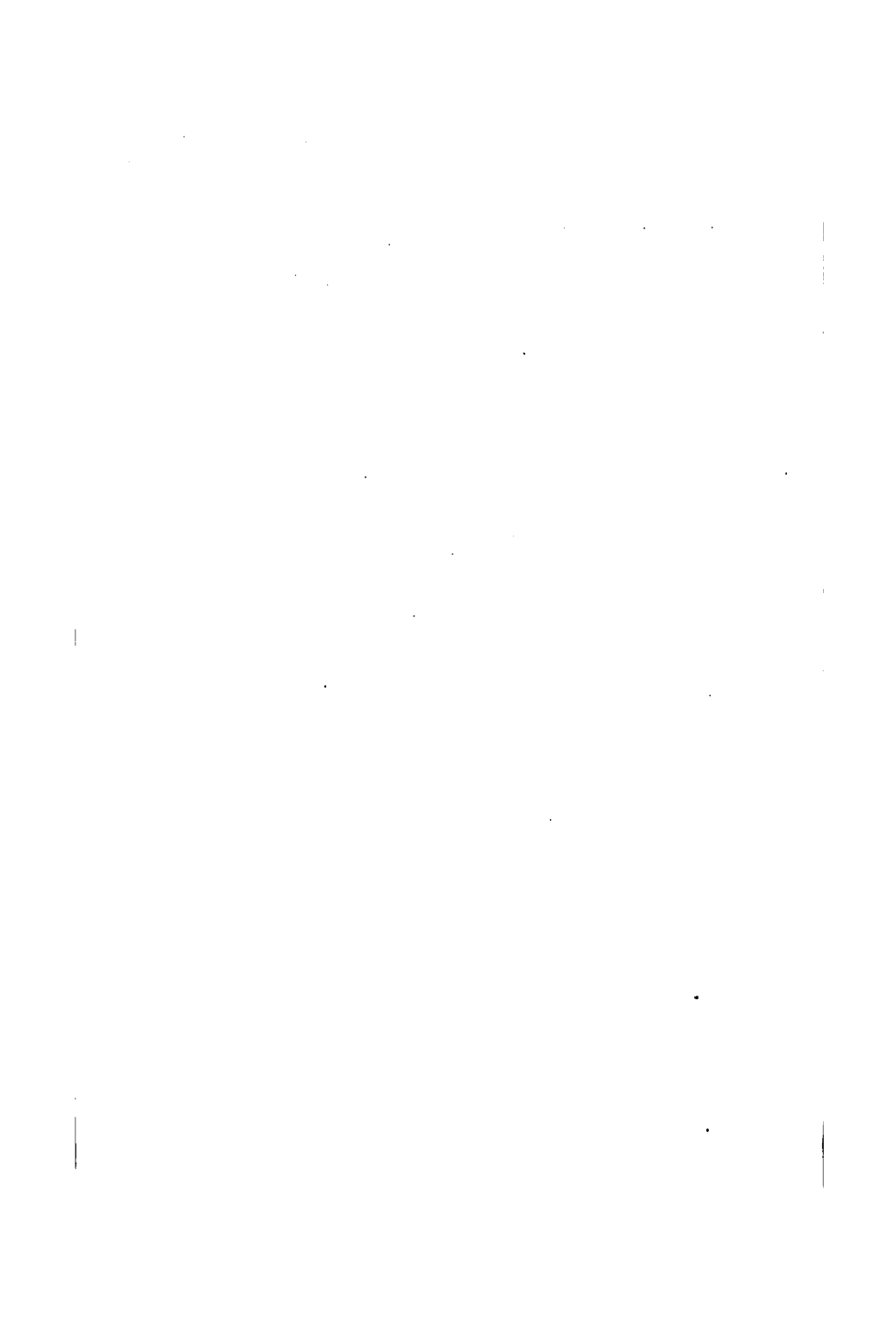
persecutions," one is inclined to mutter grimly: "You are all safe, mother Church, and you are the persecutor, not the persecuted." The service concludes with the same unreal cant about afflictions and infirmities, till one could wish almost to hear something of the style of observation made by an angry nurse to a tiresome child: "If you don't stop crying this minute, I will give you something to cry for." If men would only be as real inside the church as they are outside; if they would think and mean what they say, this pitiful burlesque would speedily be put an end to, and they would no longer offer up that sacrifice of lying lips, which are said to be "an abomination to the Lord."

PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS UPON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

These special prayers are, perhaps, on the whole, the most childish of all the childish prayers in the Church-book before us. A prayer "for rain;" a prayer "for fair weather:" it is almost too late to argue seriously against prayers like these, except that uneducated people do still believe that God regulates the weather, day by day, and may be influenced in His arrangements by the prayer of some weather-critic below. Yet it is a literal fact that storm-signals fly before the approaching storm, and prepare people for its coming, so that when it sweeps across our seas the vessels are safely in port, which otherwise would have sunk beneath its fury; meteorology is progressing day by day, and is becoming more and more perfect, but this science—as all other science—would be impossible if God could be influenced by prayer; a storm-signal would be needless if prayer could stay the storm, and would be unreliable if a prayer could suddenly, in mid-ocean, check the course of the

tempest. Science is only possible when it is admitted that "God works by laws," i.e., that His working at all need not be taken into account. The laws of weather are as unchangeable as all other natural laws, for laws are nothing more than the ascertained sequence of events; not until that sequence has been found by long observation to be invariable, does the sequence receive the title of "a law." As the weather of to-day is the result of the weather of countless yesterdays, the only way in which prayers for change can be effectual is that God should change the whole weather of the past, and so let fresh causes bring about fresh results; but this seems a rather large prayer, to say the least of it, and might, by the carnal mind, be considered as somewhat presumptuous. In the prayers "in the time of dearth and famine" we find the old barbarous notion that men's moral sins are punished by physical "visitations of God," and that God's blessing will give plenty in the place of dearth: if men work hard they will get more than if they pray hard, and even long ago in Eden God could not make his plants grow, because "there was not a man to till the ground;" at least, so says the Bible. The prayer "in the time of war," is strikingly beautiful, begging the All-Father to abate the pride, assuage the malice, and confound the devices of some of His children for the advantage of the others. The "most religious and gracious" Sovereign recommended to the care of God has been known to be such a king as George IV., but yet clergy and people went on day after day speaking of him thus to a God who "searcheth the hearts." A quaint old Prayer-Book remarks upon this prayer for the High Court of Parliament, that the "right disposing of the hearts of legislators proceeds from God," and that "both disbelief and ignorance must have made fearful progress where this principle is not recognised." In these latter days we fear that disbelief and

ignorance of this kind *have* made very considerable progress. The Thanksgivings run side by side with the prayers in subjects, and are therefore open to the same criticisms. None of these prayers or praises can be defended by reason or by argument; reason shows us their utter folly, and their complete uselessness. Is it wise to persist in forcing into people's lips words which have lost all their meaning, and which the people, if they trouble themselves to think about them at all, at once recognise as false? All danger in progress lies in the obstinate maintenance of things which have outlived their age; just as a stream which flows peacefully on, spreading plenty and fertility in its course, and growing naturally wider and fuller, will—if dammed up too much—burst at length through the dam, and rush forward as a torrent, bearing destruction and ruin in its course; so will gradual and gentle reform in ancient habits change all that needs changing, without abrupt alterations, letting the stream of thought grow wider and fuller; but if all Reform be delayed, if all change be forbidden, if the dam of prejudice, of custom, of habit, bar the stream too long, then thought hurls it down with the crash of revolution, and many a thing is lost in the swirling torrent which might have remained long, and might have beautified human life. Few things call more loudly for Reform than our hitherto loudly-boasted Reformation.



THE BEAUTIES
OF
THE PRAYER-BOOK.

PART II.



PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1876.

Price Sixpence.

13983. c. 30.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY C. W. BRYNELL, LITTLE PULTENEY STREET,
HAYMARKET, W.

THE BEAUTIES OF THE PRAYER-BOOK.

THE COMMUNION SERVICE.

NO doctrine, perhaps, has done so much to cause disunion in the Church as the doctrine of Communion enshrined in the Lord's Supper. A feast of love in idea, it has been pre-eminently a feast of hate in reality, and the fiercest contests have been waged over this "last legacy of the Redeemer." Down to the time of the Reformation it was the central service of the Church universal, Eastern and Western alike: it was the Liturgy, distinguished from every other office by this distinctive name; round this rite revolved the whole of the other services, as week-days around the Lord's Day; on its due performance was lavished everything of beauty and of splendour that wealth could bring; sweetest incense, most harmonious music, richest vestments, rarely jewelled vessels, pomp of procession, stateliness of ceremony, all brought their glory and their beauty to render magnificent the reception of the present God. Among the Reformed Churches the festival was shorn of its grandeur; it became once more the simple "supper of the Lord," no memorial sacrifice, but only a commemorative rite; no coming of the Lord to men, but only a sign of the union through faith of the believer with the Saviour. At the present time the old contest rages, even within the bosom of the Reformed Church of England; one party still clings to the elder belief of a real presence of Christ in the elements themselves, or in indissoluble connection with

them, and therefore celebrates the service with much of the ancient pomp ; while the other furiously rejects this so-called idolatry, and makes the service as bare and as simple as possible. Both parties can claim parts of the Communion Office as upholding their special views, for the English service has passed through much of tinkering from High and Low, and retains the marks of the alterations that have been made by each.

To those outside the Church this office has particular attraction, as being, in a special manner, a link between the past and the present, and being full of traces of the ancient religion of the world, that catholic sun-worship of which Christianity is a modernised revival. From the Nicene Creed, in which Jesus is described as "God of God, *Light of Light*, very God of very God, Begotten not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By Whom all things were made"—from this point we breathe the full atmosphere of the elder world, and find ourselves engaged in the worship of that Light of Light, who, being the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, has for ages and ages been adored as incarnate in Mithra, in Christna, in Osiris, in Christ. We give thanks for "the redemption of the world by the death and passion of 'the Sun-Saviour, who suffered on the Cross for us,' who lay in darkness and in the shadow of death;" we praise Him who fills heaven and earth with His glory, and who rose as "the Paschal Lamb," and has "taken away the sin of the world," bearing away in the sign of the Lamb the darkness and dreariness of the winter ; we remember the Holy Ghost, the fresh spring wind, who, "as it had been a mighty wind," came to bring us "out of darkness" into "the clear light" of the sun ; then we see the priest, with his face turned to the sun-rising, take the bread and wine, the symbols of the God, and bless them for the food of men, these sym-

bolts being changed into the very substance of the deity, for are they not, in very truth, of him alone? "How naturally does the eternal work of the sun, daily renewed, express itself in such lines as

'Into bread his heat is turned,
Into generous wine his light.'

And imagining the sun as a person, the change to 'flesh' and 'blood' becomes inevitable; while the fact that the solar forces are actually changed into food, without forfeiting their solar character, finds expression in the doctrines of transubstantiation and the real presence." ('Keys of the Creeds,' page 91.) After this union with the Deity, by partaking of his very self, we praise once more the "Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world," and is "most high in the glory of God the Father." The resemblance is made the nearer in the churches where much of ceremony is found (although noticeable in all, since that resemblance is stereotyped in the formulas themselves; but in the more elaborate performances the old rites are more clearly apparent) in the tonsured head of the priest, in the suns often embroidered on vestment and on altar-cloth, in the rays that surround the sacred monogram on the vessels, in the cross imprinted on the bread, and marking each utensil, in the lighted candles, in the grape-vine chiselled on the chalice—in all these, and in many another symbol, we read the whole story of the Sun-god, written in hieroglyphics as easily decipherable by the initiated as is the testimony of the rocks by the geologist.

But passing by this antiquarian side of the Office, we will examine it as a service suitable for the use of educated and thoughtful people at the present time. The Rubric which precedes the Office is one of those unfortunate rules which are obsolete as regards their practice, and yet which—from their preservation—appear to simple-minded parsons to be intended to be enforced, whereby the said parsons fall into the

clutches of the law, and suffer grievously. "An open and notorious evil-liver" must not be permitted to come to the Lord's Table, and this expression seems to be explained in the Exhortation in the Office, wherein we read: "if any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His word, an adulterer, or be in malice, or envy, or in any other grievous crime, repent you of your sins, or else come not to that holy Table; lest, after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul." In a late case, the Sacrament was refused to one who disbelieved in the devil and who slandered God's word, on those very grounds, and it would seem to be an act of Christian charity so to deny it; for surely to say that part of God's word is "contrary to religion and decency" must be to slander it, if words have any meaning, and people who do not believe in the devil ought hardly to be sharers in a rite after which the devil will enter into them with such melancholy consequences. It would seem more consistent either to alter the formulas or else to carry them out; true, one clergyman wrote that the responsibility lay with the unworthy recipient who "did nothing else but increase" his "damnation," but it is scarcely a pleasing notion that the clergyman should stand inviting people to the Lord's table and, coolly handing to one of those who accept, the body of Christ, say, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life," when he means—in the delicate language used by the above-mentioned clergyman—"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ damn thy body and soul unto everlasting death." No one but a clergyman could dream of so offensive a proceeding, and, to those who believe, one so terribly awful.

The Ten Commandments which stand in the fore-

front of the service are very much out of place as regards some of them, to say nothing of the want of truthfulness in the assertion, that "God spake these words," &c. In the second we are forbidden to make any graven image, or any likeness of any thing, a command which would destroy all art, and which no member of the congregation can have the smallest notion of obeying. The Jews, who made the cherubim over the ark, upon which God sat, are popularly supposed not to have disobeyed this command, because the cherubim were not the likeness of anything in heaven, earth, or water: they were, like unicorns, creatures undiscovered and undiscoverable. Yet in direct opposition to this command, Solomon made brazen oxen to support his sea of brass (1 Kings vii. 25, 29), and lions on the steps of his ivory throne (1 Kings x. 19, 20); and God himself is said to have ordered Moses to make a Brazen Serpent. God is described, in this same Commandment, as "a jealous God"—which is decidedly immoral and unpleasant—who visits "the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;" the *justice* of this is so obvious that no comment on it is necessary. The fourth Commandment is another which no one dreams of attending to; in the first place, we do not keep the seventh day at all, and in the second, our man-servant, our maid-servant, and our cattle do all manner of work on the day we keep as the Sabbath. Further, who in the present day believes that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day;" geology, astronomy, ethnology have taught us otherwise, and, among those who repeat the response to this commandment in a London church, not one could probably be found who believes it to be true. The fifth Commandment is equally out of place, for dutiful children do not live any longer

than undutiful. The remainder touch simple moral duties, enforced by all creeds alike, and are noticeable for their omissions and not for their commissions: the insertion of the Buddhist Commandment against intoxication, for instance, would be an improvement, although such a commandment is naturally not to be found in the case of so gross and sensual a people as the ancient Jews. The alternative prayers for the Queen, which follow next, are only worth noting, because the first enshrines the doctrine of divine right, which is long since dead and buried, except in church; and the other says "that the hearts of Kings are in thy rule and governance," and suggests the thought that, if this be so, it is better to be out of that "rule and governance," the effects on the hearts of Kings not having been specially attractive. The Nicene Creed comes next, and is open to the objections before made against the Apostles' Creed; the last clauses relating to the Holy Ghost are historically interesting, since the "and the Son" forms the *Filioque* which severed Eastern from Western Christendom;* "Who with the Father and the Son together" ought to be "worshipped and glorified," would be more true to fact than "is," since the Holy Ghost is sadly ignored by modern Christendom, and has a very small share of either

* A short, but very graphic account of the shameful transaction by which the *Filioque* clause was, so to speak, smuggled into the Nicene Creed, is to be found in the first ten or twelve pages of the shilling pamphlet written by Edmund S. Ffoulkes, B.D., entitled "The Church's Creed, or the Crown's Creed," published by J. T. Hayes, Lyall-place, Eaton-square, London. The following short prayer, "Mentes nostras, quasumus, Domine, Paráclitus, qui à te procedit, illuminet: et inducat in omnem, sicut tuus promisit Filius, veritatem" (*vide Præparatio ad Missam*, in the "Missale Romanum"), clearly proves, too, that the Church of Rome once held that the Holy Ghost only proceeded from the Father, as the Dominus in it can only refer to the Father.

prayers or hymns: yet he is the husband of the Virgin Mary, and the Father of Jesus Christ; he is, therefore, a very important, though puzzling, person in the Godhead, being the Father of him from whom he himself proceeds: this is a mystery, and can only be understood by faith. The texts that follow are remarkable for their ingenious selection: "Who goeth a warfare," &c. (1 Cor. ix. 7); "If we have sown," &c. (1 Cor. ix. 9); "Do ye not know," &c. (1 Cor. ix. 13); "He that soweth little" (2 Cor. ix. 6); "Let him that is taught" (Gal. vi. 6). The pervading selfishness of motive is also worth noting: Give now in order that ye may get hereafter; "Never turn thy face from any poor man, *and then the face of the Lord shall not be turned away from thee*;" "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord: *and look, what he layeth out, it shall be paid him again*;" "If thou hast much, give plenteously; if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little; *for so gathered thou thyself a good reward in the day of necessity*."* No free, glad giving here; no willing, joyful aid to a poorer brother, because he needs what I can give; no ready offer of the cup of cold water, simply because the thirsty is there and wants the refreshment; ever the hateful whisper comes: "thou shall in no wise lose thy reward." These time-serving offerings are then presented to God by being placed "upon the holy Table," and we then get another prayer for Queen, Christian Kings, authorities, Bishops and people in general, concluding with thanks for the dead, not a cheerful subject to bless God for, if there chance to be present any mourner whose heart is sore with the loss of

* As if the clergy, with very few exceptions, are not sufficiently provided for by the tithes, &c., without having to go a-begging like either Buddhist or Roman Catholic monks, to both of whom P.P. and P.M. are not inappropriately applied (Professors of Poverty and Practisers of Mendicancy).

a beloved one. At this point the service is supposed to end, when no celebration of the Holy Communion is intended, and here we find two Exhortations, or notices of celebration, from the first of which we have already quoted :* in the second, we cannot help remarking the undignified position in which God is placed ; it is a "grievous and unkind thing" not to come to a rich feast when invited thereto, wherefore we are to fear lest by withdrawing ourselves from this holy Supper, we "provoke God's indignation against" us. "Consider with yourselves how great injury ye do unto God : " what a very curious expression. Is God thus at the mercy of man ? Surely, then, of all living Beings the lot of God must be the saddest, if his happiness and his glory are in the hands of each man and woman ; the greater his knowledge the greater the misery, and as his knowledge is perfect, and the vast majority of human kind know and care nothing about him, his wretchedness must be complete. All things being ready, the clergyman begins by another Exhortation, of somewhat threatening character : "So is the danger great if we receive the same unworthily. For then we are guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour ; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord's Body ; we kindle God's wrath against us ; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death." (Surely we cannot be plagued with more than one kind of death at once, and we can't die sundry times, even after the Communion.) One almost wonders why anyone accepts this very threatening invitation, even though

* It is, however, only just to say that that portion of it contained between "*The Way and Means thereto,*" and "*Offences at God's Hands,*" is one of the best bits in the whole Prayer-Book, and which far surpasses the generality of sermons one hears afterwards.

there are advantages promised to "meet partakers." The High Church party have indeed the right to talk much of the real presence, since ordinary bread and wine have none of these fearful penalties attached to the eating and drinking, and some curious change must have taken place in them before all these terrible consequences can ensue. What would happen if some consecrated bread and wine chanced to be left by mistake, and a stray comer into the vestry eat it unknowingly? One thinks of Anne Askew, who, told that a mouse eating a crumb fallen from the Host would infallibly be damned, replied, "Alack, poor mouse!" Then follows a Confession of the most cringing kind, fit only for the lips of some coward suppliant crouching at the feet of an Eastern monarch; it is marvelous that free English men and women can frame their lips into phrases of such utter abasement, even to a God; manliness in religion is sorely needed, unless, indeed, God be something smaller than man, and be pleased with a degradation painful to human eyes. The prayer of consecration is the central point of the ordinance; of old they prayed for the descent of the Holy Ghost on the elements, "for whatsoever the Holy Ghost toucheth is sanctified and clean"—it is not explained how the Holy Ghost, being omnipresent, manages to avoid touching everything—and now the priest asks that in receiving the bread and wine we "may be partakers of" Christ's Body and Blood, and repeats the words, "This is my Body," "This is my Blood," laying his hand alternately over the bread and the wine; now if this means anything, if it is not mere mockery, it means that after the consecration the bread and wine are other than they were before; if it does not mean this, the whole prayer is simply a farce, a piece of acting scarcely decent under the circumstances. But flesh and blood! Putting aside the extreme repulsiveness of the idea, the coarseness of the act, the utter unpleasantness of eating flesh

and drinking blood, all of which has become non-disgusting by habit and fashion, and the distastefulness of which can scarcely be realised by any believer—putting aside all this, is there any change in the bread and wine? Examine it; analyse it; test it in any and every fashion; still it answers back to the questioner, “bread and wine.” Are our senses deceived? Then try a hundred different persons; all cannot be deceived alike. Unless every result of experience is untrustworthy, we have here to do with bread and wine, and with nothing more. “But faith is needed.” Ah yes! There is the secret: no flesh and blood without faith; no miracle without credulity. Miracle-working priests are only successful among credulously-disposed people; miracles can only be received by those who think it less likely that Nature should speak falsely than that man should deceive; those who believe in this change through consecration cannot be touched by argument; they have closed their eyes that they may not see, their ears that they may not hear; no knowledge can reach them, for they have shut the gateways whereby it could enter, they are literally dead in their superstition, buried beneath the stone of their faith. The reception of the Body and Blood of Christ being over, the people having knelt to eat and drink, as is only right when eating and drinking Christ (John vi. 57), the Lord’s Prayer is said for the second time, a prayer and thanksgiving follows, confined to “we and all thy whole Church,” for the spirit is the same as that of the prayer of Christ, “I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me” (John xvii. 9), and then the service winds up with the *Gloria in Excelsis* and the Benediction. Such is the “bounden duty and service” offered by the Church to God, the service of which the central act must be either a farce or a falsehood, and therefore insulting to the God to whom it is offered. Regarded as a service to God,

the whole Communion Office is objectionable in the highest degree ; regarded as an antiquarian survival, it is very interesting and instructive ; it is surely time that it should be put in its right place, and that its true origin should be recognised. The day is gone by for these barbarous, though poetic, ceremonials ; the "flesh and blood," which was a bold figure for the heat and light of the sun, becomes coarse when joined in thought to a human being ; ceremonies that fitted the childhood of the world are out of place in its manhood, as the play that is graceful in the child would be despicable in the man ; these rites are the baby-clothes of the world, and cannot be stretched to fit the stalwart limbs of its maturer age, cannot add grace to its form, or dignity to its graver walk.

THE BAPTISMAL OFFICES.

For all purposes of criticism the Offices for "Public Baptism of Infants, to be used in the Church," for "Private Baptism of Children in houses," and "Baptism to such as are of riper years, and able to answer for themselves," may be treated as one and the same, the leading idea of each service being identical ; this idea is put forward clearly and distinctly in the preface to the Office : "Dearly beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin ; and that our Saviour Christ saith, None can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost ; I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his bounteous mercy he will grant to this Child that thing which by nature he cannot have." According to the doctrine of the Church, then, baptism is absolutely necessary to salvation : "*None can enter . . . except he be . . . born*

anew of water ;" thus peals out the doom of condemnation on the whole human race, save that fragment of it which is sprinkled from the Christian font ; there is no evasion possible here ; no exception made in favour of heathen peoples ; no mercy allowed to those who have no opportunity of baptism ; none can enter save through "the laver of regeneration." Can any words be too strong whereby to denounce a doctrine so shameful, an injustice so glaring ? A child is born into the world ; it is no fault of his that he is conceived in sin ; it is no fault of his that he is born in sin ; his consent was not asked before he was ushered into the world ; no offer was made to him which he could reject of this terrible gift of a condemned life ; flung is he, without his knowledge, without his will, into a world lying under the curse of God, a child of wrath, and heir of damnation. "By nature he *cannot* have." Then why should God be wrath with him because he hath not ? The whole arrangement is of God's own making. He fore-ordained the birth ; he gave the life ; the helpless, unconscious infant lies there, the work of his own hands ; good or bad, he is responsible for it ; heir of love or of wrath, he has made it what it is ; as wholly is it his doing as the unconscious vessel is the doing of the potter ; as reasonably may God be angry with the child as the potter swear at the clay he has clumsily moulded : if the vessel be bad, blame the potter ; if the creature be bad, blame the Creator. The congregation pray that God "of his bounteous mercy," "for thine infinite mercies," will save the child, "that he, being delivered from thy wrath," may be blessed. It is no question of mercy we have to do with here ; it is a question of simple justice, and nothing more ; if God, for his own "good pleasure," or in the pursuance of the designs of his infinite wisdom, has placed this unfortunate child in so terrible a position, he is bound by every tie of justice, by every sacred claim

of right, to deliver the blameless victim, and to place him where he shall have a fair chance of well-being. "It is certain by God's Word," says the Rubric, "that children *which are baptized*, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved." And those which are not baptized? The Holy Roman Church sends these into a cheerful place called Limbo, and the baby-souls wander about in chill twilight, cursed with immortality, shut out for ever from the joys of Paradise. Many readers will remember Lowell's pathetic poem on this subject, and the ghastly baptism; they will also know into what devious paths of argumentative indecency that Church has wandered in deciding upon the fate of unbaptized infants;—how, when mothers have died in childbirth, the yet unborn children have been baptized to save them from the terrible doom pronounced upon them by their Father in heaven, even before they saw the light;—how it has been said that in cases where mother and child cannot both be saved the mother should be sacrificed that the child may not die unbaptized. Into the details of these arguments we cannot enter; they are only fit for orthodox Christians, in whose pages they may read them who list. Truly, the Lord is a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, since unborn children are condemned for the untimely death of their mother, and unbaptized infants for the carelessness of their parents or nurses. Of course the majority of English clergymen believe nothing of this kind; but then why do they read a service which implies it? Why do they use words in a non-natural sense? Why do they put off their honesty when they put on their surplices? And why will the laity not give utterance to their thoughts on these and all such objectionable parts of the Service? In the Office for Adults, as regards the necessity of the Sacrament, the words come in: "where it may be had;" but the phrase reads

as though it had been written in the margin by some kindly soul, and had from thence crept into the text, for it is in direct opposition to the whole argument of the address wherein it occurs, and to the rest of the office, as also to the other two offices for infants. The stress laid upon right baptism, *i.e.*, baptism with water, accompanied by the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," appears specially in the office to follow the private baptism of a child, should the child live; for the Rubric directs that if there be any doubt of the use of the water and the formula, "which are essential parts of Baptism," the priest shall perform the baptismal ceremony, saying, "If thou art not already baptized, I baptize thee," &c. Surely such care and pains to ensure correct baptism speak with sufficient plainness as to the importance attached by the Church to this initiatory rite; this importance she gives to it in other places: none, unbaptized, must approach her altar to take the "bread of life:" none, unbaptized, must be buried by her ministers, "in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life." The baptized are within the ark of the Church; the unbaptized are struggling in the waves of God's wrath outside; no hand can be outstretched to save them; they are strangers, aliens, to the covenant of promise; they are without hope. The whole office for infants reads like a play: the clergyman asks that the infant "may receive remission of his sins;" what sins? The people are admonished "that they defer not the Baptism of their children longer than the first or second Sunday next after their birth." What sins can a baby a week old have committed? from what sins can he need release? for what sins can he ask forgiveness? And yet, here is a whole congregation prostrate before Almighty God, praying that a tiny long-robed baby may be forgiven, may be pardoned his sins of—coming into the world when God sent him! The

ceremony would be ludicrous were it not so pitiful. And supposing that the infant does need forgiveness, and has sins to be washed away, why should a few drops of water, sprinkled on the face—or bonnet—of the baby, or even the immersion of his body in the font, wash away the sins of his soul? The water is “sanctified;” we pray: “Sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of sin.” As the hymn sweetly puts it:

“The water in this font
Is water, by gross mortals eyed;
But, seen by faith, ’tis blood
Out of a dear friend’s side.”

Blood once more! how Christians cling to the revolting imagery of a bygone and barbarous age of gross conceptions. And, applied by faith, it cleanses the soul of the child from sin. Well, the whole thing is consistent: the invisible soul is washed from invisible sin by invisible blood, and to all outward appearance the child remains after baptism exactly what it was before—except it chance to get inflammation of the lungs, as we have known happen, from High Church free use of water, which is, perhaps, the promised baptism of fire. The promises of the sponsors are in full accordance with the rest of the services; promises made by other people, in the child’s name, as to his future conduct, over which they have no control. The baby renounces the devil and all his belongings, believes the Apostles’ Creed, and answers “that is my desire,” when asked if he will be baptized; all which “is very pretty acting,” but jars somewhat on the feeling of reality which ought surely to characterize a believer’s intercourse with his God. The child being baptized and signed with the Cross, “is regenerate,” according to the declaration of the priest. Some contend that the Church of England does not teach baptismal regeneration, but it is hard to see how any one can read this service, and then

deny the teaching; it is clearer and fuller than is the teaching of her voice upon most subjects. The ceremony of baptism and the idea of regeneration are both derived from the sun-worship of which so many traces have already been pointed out: the worshippers of Mithra practised baptism, and it is common to the various phases of the solar faith. Regeneration, in some parts, especially in India, was obtained in a different fashion: a hole through a rock, or a narrow passage between two, was the sacred spot, and a worshipper, squeezing himself through such an opening, was regenerated, and was, by this literal representation of birth, born a second time, born into a new life, and the sins of the former life were no longer accounted to him. Many such holes are still preserved and revered in India, and there can be little doubt that the ancient Druidic remains bear traces of being adapted for this same ceremony, although a natural fissure appears ever to have been accounted the most sacred.*

One ought scarcely to leave unnoted the preamble to the first prayer in the baptismal service: "Who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water; and also didst safely lead the children of Israel thy people through the Red Sea, figuring thereby thy holy baptism; and by the baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, in the river Jordan, didst sanctify water to the mystical washing of sin." In the two first examples given the choice of the Church appears to be peculiarly unfortunate, as in each case water was the element to be escaped *from*, and it was a source of death, not of life; perhaps, though, there is a subtle meaning

* Even in this country, at Brimham Rocks, near Ripon, in Yorkshire, the dead form of the custom is, or was, until very lately, kept up by the guide sending all visitors, who chose to avail themselves of the privilege, through such a fissure.

in the Red Sea, it points to the blood of Christ: but then, again, the Red Sea drowned people, and surely the anti-type is not so dangerous as that? It must be a mystery. It would be interesting to know how many of the educated clergymen who read this prayer believe in the story of the Noachian deluge, and of the miraculous passage of the Red Sea; and farther, how many of them believe that God, by these fables, figured his holy baptism. Will the nineteenth century ever summon up energy enough to shake off these remnants of a dead superstition, and be honest enough to stop using a form of words which is no longer a vehicle of belief? When the Prayer Book was compiled these words had a meaning; to-day they have none. Shall not a second Reformation sweep away these dead beliefs, even as the first swept away for its own age the phrases which represented an earlier and coarser creed?

THE ORDER OF CONFIRMATION.

"These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." In those remarkable days the "order of Confirmation" might have been in consonance with its surroundings, a state of things which is very far from being its present position. Mr. Spurgeon, writing for the benefit of street preachers, lately pointed out very sensibly that as the Holy Ghost no longer gave the gift of tongues, they had "better stick to their grammars," and in these degenerate

days honest effort is likely to show results more satisfactory than those which ensue from the laying on of Bishops' hands. When the Apostles performed this ceremony which the Bishop now performs after their example, definite proofs of its efficacy were said to have been seen ; so much so, indeed, that Simon, the sorcerer, wished to invest some money in heavenly securities, so that "on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the Holy Ghost." A Simon would manifestly never be found nowadays ready to pay a Bishop for the power of causing the effects of Confirmation. So far as the carnal eye can see, the white-robed, veiled young ladies, and the shamefaced black-coated boys, who throng the church on a Confirmation day, return from the altar very much the same as they went up to it: no one begins to speak with tongues ; if they did, the beadle would probably interfere and quench the Spirit with the greatest promptitude. They are supposed to have received some special gifts: "the spirit of wisdom and understanding ; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness;" and in addition to these six spirits, there is one more: "the spirit of thy holy fear." No less than seven spirits, then, enter these lads and lasses. Wisdom and understanding are easily perceptible: are they wiser after Confirmation than they were before? do they understand more rapidly? do they know more? if there be no perceptible difference is the presence of the Holy Spirit of none effect? if of none effect, can his presence be of any use, of the very smallest advantage? if of no use, why make all this parade about giving a thing whose gift makes the recipient no richer than he was before? Besides, what certainty can there be that the Holy Ghost is given at all? Allowing—what seems to an outsider a gross piece of irreverence—that the Holy Ghost is in the fingers of the Bishop to be given away when it suits the Bishop's convenience, or is in

a sort of reservoir, of which the Bishop turns the tap and lets the stream of grace descend—allowing all this as possible, ought not some “sign to follow them that believe?” How can we be sure that the Bishop is not an impostor, going through a conjurer’s gestures and mutterings, and no magic results accruing? If, in the ordinary course of daily life, any one came and offered us some valuable things he said that he possessed, and then went through the form of giving them to us, saying: “Here they are; guard and preserve them for the rest of your life;” and the outstretched hand contained nothing at all, and we found ourselves with nothing in our grasp, should we be content with his assurance that we had really got them, although we might not be able to see them, and we ought to have sufficient faith to take his word for it? Should we not utterly refuse to believe that we had received anything unless we had some proof of having done so, and were in some way the better or the worse for it? The truth is that people’s religion is, to them, a matter of such small importance that they do not trouble themselves about proof—Faith is enough to comfort them; the six week-days require their brains, their efforts, their thought: the Sunday is the Lord’s day, and he must see to it: earth needs all their earnest attention, but heaven must take care of itself; the validity of an earthly title is important, and the confirmation of a right to inherit property in this world is eagerly welcomed, but the Confirmation to a heavenly inheritance is a mere farce, which it is the fashion to go through about the age of fifteen, but which is only a fashion, the confirmation of a faith in nothing in particular to an invisible heritage of nothing at all.

THE FORM OF THE SOLEMNIZATION OF
MATRIMONY.

One of the most curious blunders regarding orthodox Christianity is, that it has tended to the elevation of woman. As a matter of fact, the Eastern ideas about women are embodied in Christianity, and these ideas are essentially degraded and degrading. From the time when Paul bade women obey their husbands, Augustine's mother was beaten, unresisting, by Augustine's father, and Jerome fled from woman's charms, and monks declaimed against the daughters of Eve, down to the present day, when Peter's authority is used against woman suffrage, Christianity has consistently regarded woman as a creature to be subject to man, because, being deceived, she was first in transgression. The Church service for matrimony is redolent of this barbarous idea, relic of a time when men seized wives by force, or else purchased them, so that the wives became, in literal fact, the property of their husbands. We learn that matrimony was "instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and his Church." It would be interesting to know how many of those joined by the Church believe in the Paradise story of man's innocency and fall. It seems that Christ has adorned the holy estate by his first miracle in Cana; but the adornment is rather of a dubious character, when we reflect that the probable effect of the miracle would be a scene somewhat too gay, from the enormous quantity of wine made by Christ for men who already had "well drunk." Christ's approval of marriage may well be considered doubtful when we remember that a virgin was chosen as his mother, that he himself remained unmarried, and that he distinctly places celibacy higher than marriage in Matt. xix. 11, 12,

where he urges: "he that is able to receive it let him receive it." St. Paul also, though he allows it to his converts, advises virginity in preference: "I say to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I;" "he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better" (see throughout 1 Cor. vii.) The reasons given for marriage are surely misplaced; last of all, it is said that marriage is "ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other;" this, instead of "thirdly," ought to be "first." "As a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry," is not a reason very honourable to the marriage estate, nor very delicate to read out before a mixed congregation to a young bride and bridegroom; so strongly objectionable is the heedless coarseness of this preface felt to be that in many churches it is entirely omitted, although it is retained—as are all remains of a coarser age—in the Prayer-Book as published by authority. The promise exchanged between the contracting parties is of far too sweeping a character, and is immoral, because promising what may be beyond the powers of the promisers to perform; "to love" "so long as ye both shall live," and "till death us do part," is a pledge far too wide; love does not stay by promising, nor is love a feeling which can be made to order. A promise to live always together might be made, although that would be unwise in this changing world, and the endless processes in the Divorce Court are a satire on this so-called joined by God; "what God hath joined together" man does continually "put asunder," and it would be wiser to adapt the service to the altered circumstances of the times in which we live. The promise of obedience and service on the woman's part should also be eliminated, and the contract should be a simple promise of fidelity between

two equal friends. The declaration of the man as he places the ring on the woman's finger is as archaic as the rest of this fossil service, and about as true: "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," says the man, when, as a matter of fact, he becomes possessed of all his wife's property and she does not become possessed of his. One of the concluding prayers is a delightful specimen of Prayer-Book science: "O God, who of thy mighty power hast made all things of nothing." What was the general aspect of affairs when there was "nothing?" how did something emerge where "nothing" was before? if God filled all space, was he "nothing?" is the existence of nothing a conceivable idea? can people think of nothing except when they don't think at all? "who also (after other things set in order) didst appoint that out of man (created after thine own image and similitude) woman should take her beginning:" "out of man," that is out of one of man's ribs; has any one tried to picture the scene: Almighty God, who has no body nor parts, taking one of Adam's ribs, and closing up the flesh, and "out of the rib made he a woman." God, a pure spirit, holding a man's rib, not in his hands, for he has none, and "making" a woman out of it, fashioning the rib into skull, and arms, and ribs, and legs. Can a more ludicrous position be imagined; and Adam? What became of his internal economy? was he made originally with a rib too much, to provide against the emergency, or did he go, for the rest of his life, with a rib too little? And the Church of England endorses this ridiculous old-world fable. Man was created "after thine own image and similitude." What is the image of God? He is a spirit and has no similitude. If man is made in his image, God must be a celestial man, and cannot possibly be omnipresent. Besides in Genesis i. 27, where it is stated that "God created man in his own image," it distinctly goes on to declare: "in the image of God

created he him; *male and female* created he them. Thus the woman is made in God's image as much as the man, and God's image is "male and female." All students know that the ancient ideas of God give him this double nature, and that no trinity is complete without the addition of the female element; but the pious compilers of the Prayer-Book did not probably intend thus to transplant the simple old nature-worship into their marriage office. Once more we hear of Adam and Eve in the next prayer, and we cannot help thinking that, considering all the trouble Eve brought upon her husband by her flirtation with the serpent, she is made rather too prominent a figure in the marriage service. The ceremony winds up with a long exhortation, made of quotations from the Epistles, on the duties of husbands and wives. Husbands are to love their wives because Christ loved a church—a reason that does not seem specially *à propos*, as husbands are not required to die for their wives or to present them to themselves glorious wives, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (!); nor would most husbands desire that their wives' conversation should be "coupled with fear." Why should women be taught thus to abase themselves? They are promised as a reward that they shall be the daughters of Sarah; but that is no great privilege, nor are English wives likely to call their husbands "lord;" if they did not adorn themselves with plaited hair and pretty apparel, their husbands would be sure to grumble, and the only defence that can be made for this absurd exhortation is that nobody ever listens to it.

Among the various reforms needed in the Marriage Laws one imperatively necessary is that all marriages should be made civil contracts—that is, that the contract which is made by citizens of the State, and which affects the interests of the State, should be entered into before a secular State official;

26 *The Beauties of the Prayer-Book.*

if after that the parties desired a religious ceremony, they could go through any arrangements they pleased in their own churches and chapels, but the civil contract should be compulsory and should be the only one recognised by the law. Of course the Church might maintain its peculiar marriage as long as it chose, but it would probably soon pass out of fashion if it were not acknowledged as binding by the State.

THE ORDER FOR THE VISITATION OF THE SICK.

Of all the services in the Prayer-Book this is, perhaps, the most striking relic of barbarism, the most completely at variance with sound and reasonable thought. The clergyman entering into a house of sickness, and as he enters the sick man's room and catches sight of him, kneeling down and exclaiming, as though horror-stricken: "Remember not, Lord, our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our forefathers; spare us, good Lord, spare Thy people whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever." This clergyman reminds one of nothing so much as of one of Job's friends, who appear to have been an even more painful infliction than Job's boils. The sickness, the patient is told, "is God's visitation," and "for what cause soever this sickness is sent unto you: whether it be to try your faith for the example of others, . . . or else it be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father; know you certainly, that if you truly repent you of your sins, and bear your sickness patiently, . . . it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth

unto everlasting life." One might question the justice of Almighty God if the theory be correct that the sickness may be sent "to try your patience for the example of others;" why should one unfortunate victim be tormented simply that others may have the advantage of seeing how well he bears it? If we are to endeavour to conform ourselves to the image of God, then it would seem that we should be doing right if we racked our neighbours occasionally to "try their patience for the example of others." And is the idea of God a reverent one? What should we think of an earthly father who tortured one of his children in order to teach the others how to bear pain? if we should condemn the earthly father as wickedly cruel, why should the same action be righteous when done by the Father in heaven? If we accept the second reason given for the sickness, it is difficult to see the rationale of it. Why should illness of the body correct illness of the mind; does pain cure fretfulness, or fever increase truthfulness? Is not sickness likely rather to bring out and strengthen mental faults than to weaken them? And how far is it true that sickness is, in any sense, the visitation of God for moral delinquencies? Is it not true, on the contrary, that a man may lie, rob, cheat, slander, tyrannise, and yet, if he observe the laws of health, may remain in robust vigour, while an upright, sincere, honest and truthful man, disregarding those same laws, may be miserably feeble and suffer an early death? Is it, or is it not a fact, that in the Middle Ages, when people prayed much and studied little, when the peasant went to the shrine for a cure instead of to the doctor, when sanitary science was unknown, and cleanliness was a virtue undreamed of,—is it, or is it not true, that pestilence and black death then swept off their thousands, while these terrible scourges have been practically driven away in modern times by proper attention to sanitary measures, by

improved drainage and greater cleanliness of living? How can that be a visitation of God for moral transgressions, which can be prevented by man if he attends to physical laws? Is man's power greater than God's, and can he thus play with the thunderbolts of the divine displeasure? The clergyman prays that "the sense of his weakness may add strength to his faith;" what fine irony is here, as body and mind grow weak faith grows strong; as a man is less able to think, he becomes more ready to believe. It is impossible to pass, without a word of censure, over the passage in the exhortation, taken from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which says, "for they (fathers of our flesh) verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure." Good earthly fathers do not chasten their children for their own amusement, while God does it "for our profit;" on the contrary, they do it for the improvement of their children, while God alone, if there be a hell, tortures his children for his own pleasure and for no gain to them. The succeeding portion of the Exhortation, that, "our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ," is full of that sad asceticism which has done so much to darken the world since the birth of Christ; men have been so engaged in looking for the "eternal joy" that they have let pass unnoted the misery here; they have been so busy planting flowers in heaven that they have let weeds grow here; yes, and they have rejoiced in the misery and in the weeds, because they were only strangers and pilgrims, [and the tribulation, which was but temporal, increased the weight of the glory that was eternal. Thus has Christianity blighted the flowers of this world, and entwined the brows of its followers with wreaths of thorns. The concluding portion of the exhortation deals with the duty of self-examination and self-accusation, that you may "not be accused and condemned in that fearful

judgment." Very wholesome teaching for a sick man; sickness always makes a person morbid, and the Church steps in to encourage the unwholesome feeling; sickness always makes a person timid and unnerved, and the Church steps in to talk about a "fearful judgment," and bewilders and stuns the confused brain by the terrible pictures called up to the mind by the thought of the last day.

But worse follows; for after the sick person has said that he stedfastly believes the creed, the clergyman is bidden by the rubric to "examine whether he repent him truly of his sins, and be in charity with all the world." Imagine a sick person being worried by an examination of this kind, putting aside the gross impertinence of the whole affair. Further, "the minister should not omit earnestly to move such persons as are of ability to be liberal to the poor." When every one remembers the terrible scandals of by-gone days, when priests drew into the net of the Church the goods of the dying, using threat of hell and promise of heaven to win that which should have been left for the widow and the orphan, one marvels that such a rubric should be left to recall the rapaciousness and the greed of the Church, and to invite priests to grasp at the wealth slipping out of dying hands. And here the sick person is to "be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, and the priest is bidden to absolve him, for Christ having "left power to his Church to absolve by his authority committed to me," says the priest, "I absolve thee." Confession; delegated authority; priestly absolution; such is the doctrine of the Church of England: all the untold abominations of the confessional are involved in this rubric and sentence, for if the man can absolve a man at one time, he can do it at another; the precious power should surely not be left unused and wasted; whenever sin presses, behold

the remedy, and thus we are launched and in full sail. But never in England shall the confessional again flourish; never again shall English women be corrupted by the foul questions of the priests; never again shall Englishmen have their mental vigour and virility destroyed by such degradation. Let the Church fall that countenances such an accursed thing, and leave English purity and English courage to grow and flourish unchecked.

The devil is in great force in this service, as is only right in a so generally barbarous an office: "Let the enemy have no advantage of him;" "defend him from the danger of the enemy;" "renew in him whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil;" "the wiles of Satan;" "deliver him from fear of the enemy;" all this must convey to the sick person a cheerful idea of the devil lingering about his bed, and trying to get hold of him before it is too late to drag him down to hell.

Is there any meaning at all in the expression: "the Almighty Lord . . . to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and *under the earth* do bow and obey?" Where is "under the earth?" The sun is under some part of the earth to some people at any given time; the stars are under, or above, according to the point of view from which they are looked at; of course the expression is only a survival from a time when the earth was flat and the bottomless pit was under it, only it seems a pity to continue to use expressions which have lost all their meaning and are now thoroughly ridiculous. People seem to think that any old things are good enough for God's service.

The last two prayers are remarkable chiefly for their melancholy and craven tone towards God: "we humbly commend," "most humbly beseeching thee." Surely God is not supposed to be an Eastern despot, desiring this kind of cringing at his feet. Yet the "Prayer for persons troubled in mind or in concu-

ence" is one pitiful wail, as though only by passionate entreaty could God be moved to mercy, and he were longing to strike, and with difficulty withheld from avenging himself. When will men learn to stand upright on their feet, instead of thus crouching on their knees? when will they learn to strive to live nobly, and then to fear no celestial anger, either in life or in death?

THE ORDER FOR THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD.

It is a little difficult to write a critical notice of a funeral office, simply because people's feelings are so much bound up in it that any criticism seems a cruelty, and any interference seems an impertinence. Round the open grave all controversy should be hushed, that no jarring sounds may mingle with the sobs of the mourners, and no quarrels wring the torn hearts of the survivors. Our criticism of this office, then, will be brief and grave.

The opening verses strike us first as manifestly inappropriate: "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die;" yet the dead is then being carried to his last home, and the words seem a mockery spoken in face of a corpse. In the Fourth Gospel they preface the raising of Lazarus, and of course are then very significant, but to-day no power raises our dead, no voice of Jesus says to the mourners, "Weep not." The second verse from Job is—as is well known—an utter mistranslation: "without my flesh" would be nearer the truth than "in my flesh," and "worms" and "body" are not mentioned in the original at all. It seems a pity that in such solemn moments known falsehoods should be used.

The whole argument in the 15th chap. of I Corinthians is the reverse of convincing. Christ is not the first fruits of them that slept. A dead man had been raised by touching the bones of Elisha (II Kings xiii. 21). Elisha, in his lifetime, had raised the dead son of the Shunamite (II Kings iv.); Elijah, before him, had raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (I Kings xvii); Christ had raised Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain. In no sense, then, if the Scriptures of the Christians be true, can it be said that Christ has become the first fruits, the first begotten from the dead. "For since by man came death"; but death did not come by man; myriads of ages before man was in the world animals were born, lived, and died, and they have left their fossilised remains to prove the falsity of the popular belief. We notice also that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." If this be so, what becomes of "the resurrection of the flesh," spoken of in the Baptismal and Visitation Offices? What has become of the "flesh and bones" which Christ had after his resurrection and with which, according to the 4th Article, he has gone into heaven? Cannot Christ "inherit the kingdom of God"? It is hard to see how, in any sense, the resurrection of Christ can be taken as a proof of the resurrection of man. Christ was only dead 36 or 37 hours before he is said to have risen again; there was no time for bodily decay, no time for corruption to destroy his frame: how could the restoration to life of a man whose body was in perfect preservation prove the possibility of the resurrection of the bodies which have long since been resolved into their constituent elements, and have gone to form other bodies, and to give shape to other modes of existence? People talk in such superior fashion of the resurrection that they never stoop to remember its necessary details, or to think where is to be found sufficient matter where-

with to clothe all the human souls on the resurrection morn. The bodies of the dead make the earth more productive; they nourish vegetable existence; transformed into grass they feed the sheep and the cattle; transformed into these they sustain human beings; transformed into these they form new bodies once more, and pass from birth to death, and from death to birth again, a perfect circle of life, transmuted by Nature's alchemy from form to form. No man has a freehold of his body; he possesses only a life-tenancy, and then it passes into other hands. The melancholy dirge which succeeds this chapter sounds like a wail of despair: man "hath but a short time to live and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay." Can any teaching be more utterly unwholesome? It is the confession of the most complete helplessness, the recognition of the futility of toil. And then the agonised pleading: "O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death." But if he be most merciful, whence all this need of weeping and wailing? If he be most merciful, what danger can there be of the bitter pains of eternal death? And again the cry rises: "Shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge Eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee." It is nothing but the wail of humanity, face to face with the agony of death, feeling its utter helplessness before the great enemy, and clinging to any straw which may float within reach of the drowning grasp; it is the horror of Life facing Death, a horror that seems felt only by the fully living and not by the dying; it is the recoil of vigorous vitality from the silence and chillness of the tomb.

After this comes a sudden change of tone, and the

mourners are told of God's "great mercy" in taking the departed, and of the "burden of the flesh," and they are bidden to give "hearty thanks" for the dead being delivered "out of the miseries of this sinful world." Can anything be more unreal? There is not one mourner there who desires to share in the great mercy, who wants to be freed from the burden of the flesh, or desires deliverance from the miseries of this world. Why should people thus play a farce beside the grave? Do they expect God to believe them, or to be deceived by such hypocrisy?

It is urged by some that the Church cannot have a "sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life" as regards some of those whom she buries with this service; and it is manifest that, if the Bible be true, drunkards and others who are to be cast into the lake of fire, can scarcely rise to eternal life at the same time, and therefore the Church has no right to express a hope where God has pronounced condemnation. The Rubric only shuts out of the hope the unbaptized, the excommunicated, and the suicide; all others have a right to burial at her hands, and to the hope of a joyful resurrection, in spite of the Bible.

We may hope that the day will soon come when people may die in England and may be buried in peace without this cry of pain and superstition over their graves. Wherever cemeteries are within reasonable distance the Rationalist may now be buried, lovingly and reverently, without the echo of that in which he disbelieved during life sounding over his grave; but throughout many small towns and country villages the Burial Service of the Church is practically obligatory, and is enforced by clerical bigotry. But the passing knell of the Establishment sounds clearer and clearer, and soon those who have rejected her services in life shall be free from her ministrations at the tomb.

THE BEAUTIES
OF
THE PRAYER-BOOK.

PART III.



PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

1876.

Price Sixpence.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY C. W. BRYNELL, LITTLE PULTENEY STREET,
HAYMARKET, W.

THE
BEAUTIES OF THE PRAYER-BOOK.

A COMMINATION;
OR, DENOUNCING OF GOD'S ANGER AND JUDGMENTS
AGAINST SINNERS.

THIS service is too beautiful to be passed over without a word of homage; the spectacle of the Church raving and cursing is too edifying to be ungratefully ignored. "Brethren, in the primitive Church there was a godly discipline that, at the beginning of Lent, such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved. . . . Instead whereof (until the said discipline may be restored again, which is much to be wished), it is thought good," &c. That is, in other words: "In days gone by, we were able to bite, as well as to bark; now that our mouths are muzzled we can only snarl; but, until the old power comes back, which is much to be wished, let us, since we cannot bite, show our teeth and growl as viciously as we can, so that people may understand that it is only the power that is wanting, and not the will, and that, if we could, we would torture and burn as vigorously as we curse and damn." And promptly the priest begins with his curses, and all the people say Amen: what a pretty sight—a whole church full of Christians with one consent cursing their neighbours! Then comes an exhortation; as so many curses are flying about we must take care of our heads: "Let us, remembering the

dreadful judgment hanging over our heads, and *always ready to fall upon us*, return to our Lord God." Always ready to fall; but is God, then, always lying in wait to catch us tripping, and crush us with his judgments? Does he punish gladly, and keep his blow suspended, to fall at the first chance our weakness gives him? If so, by no means let us return to our Lord God, but let us rather try to put a considerable distance between himself and us, and endeavour, like the prophet Jonah, to flee from the presence of the Lord. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God: he shall pour down rain upon the sinners, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest." And who made the sinners? Who called them into the world without their own consent? Who made them with an evil nature? Who moulded them as the potter the clay? Who made it impossible for them to go to Jesus unless he drew them, and then did not draw them? If God wants to pour fire and brimstone on anybody, he should pour it on himself, for he made the sinners, and is responsible for their existence and their sin. "It shall be too late to knock when the door shall be shut; too late to cry for mercy when it is the time of justice." How utterly repulsive is this picture of the popular and traditional God: how black the colours wherein is painted this Moloch; surely the artist must have been sketching a picture of the devil, and by mistake wrote under it the name of God when he should have put the name of Satan. If, however, we submit ourselves, and walk in his ways, and seek his glory, and serve him duly—that is, if we acknowledge injustice to be justness, and cruelty to be mercy, and evil to be good—then we shall escape "the extreme malediction which shall light upon them that shall be set on the left hand." On the whole, brave men and women will prefer to do rightly and justly here, caring much about serving man, and nothing about glorifying such a God, and leaving the

malediction alone, very sure that no punishment can befall a man for living nobly, and that no fear need cloud the death-bed of him who has made his life a blessing to mankind.

Of course, after all this preface, come cringing confessions of sin. The 51st Psalm leads the way, the congregation having by this time become so thoroughly confused that they see no incongruity in saying that when God has built the walls of Jerusalem he will be pleased with burnt offerings and oblations, and that "then shall they offer young bullocks upon thy altar." As a matter of fact, they have no intention of offering young bullocks at all—bullocks having become too useful to be wasted in that fashion—but they have so thoroughly left the realm of common sense that they have become unconscious of the absurdities which they repeat. The gross exaggeration of the concluding prayers must be patent to everyone; they are full of the hysteria which passes for piety. "We are grieved and wearied with the burden of our sins," although most of the congregation will forget all about the burden before they leave the church: we are "vile earth and miserable sinners;" we "meekly acknowledge our vileness." One longs to shake them all, and tell them to stand up like men and women, instead of cringing there like cowards, whining about their vileness. If they are vile, why don't they mend, instead of saying the same thing every year? They should be ashamed to tell God of their miserable condition year after year, when his grace is sufficient for them, and they might be perfect as their Father in heaven.

The Church in all this service reminds one of nothing so much as a wicked old crone, who whines to the parson and scolds all the children. In days gone by the old woman has been the terror of the village, and her sturdy arm has been shown on many a black eye and bruised face; now she can no longer

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strike, she can only curse; she can no longer tyrannise, she can only scowl; her palsied tongue still mutters the curses which her shrivelled arm can no longer translate into act, and in her bleared eye, in her wrinkled cheeks, in her shaking frame, we read the record of an evil youth, wherein she abused her strength, and we see descending upon her the gloom of a dishonoured age, and the night of a fathomless despair.

FORMS OF PRAYER

TO BE USED AT SEA.

There is now a special service used at the launching of her Imperial Majesty's war-vessels which has not yet found its way into the Prayer-Book; curious thoughts arise in the mind in contemplating that fashion, conjoined to the office to be "used in her Majesty's navy every day." How does God protect "the persons of us, thy servants, and the fleet in which we serve?" Does prayer make bad ships more seaworthy, or supply the place of stout iron and sound wood? If the ship is not safe without prayer, will prayer make it so? If not, what is the use of praying over it? Either the ship is seaworthy or it is not: if it is, it will sail safely without prayer; if it is not, will prayer carry the rotten ship through the storm? If prayer be so efficacious, would it not be cheaper to use less wood and more prayer? Bad materials roughly put together would serve, for a curate would be cheaper than a shipwright, and much prayer would enable us to dispense with much labour. In "storms at sea" a special prayer is to be used: "O most powerful and glorious Lord God, at whose command the winds blow, and lift up the waves of the sea, and who stillest the rage thereof:" "O sand

thy word of command to rebuke the raging winds and the roaring sea." Is not this the prayer of utter ignorance, the prayer of an unscientific age? For what does the prayer imply? Only the modest request that the state of the atmosphere round the whole globe may be modified to suit the convenience of a small ship! And not only that, but also that the whole course of weather may be changed during countless yesterdays, the weather of to-day being only an effect caused by them. Such prayers were offered up in former days by a people who knew nothing of the inviolability of natural order, and who imagined that the weather might be changed at their bidding as the clerk may push on the hands of the church clock. The sailors are very frank in their confession: "When we have been safe and seen all things quiet about us, we have forgot thee, our God. . . . But now we see how terrible thou art in all thy works of wonder; the great God to be feared above all." At any rate they cannot be accused of hypocrisy in their dealings with God! Nor is this all. Short prayers are provided for those who have no time for the long ones and if the danger grows very pressing, everybody who can be spared is to join in a special confession of sins, taken from the Communion Office. It would surely be well to avoid a very pious crew, as they might be wasting the time in prayer which might save the ship by work. One serious thought presents itself for consideration in connection with this supposed power of God to smoothe the turbulent billows. Many ships go down year after year; many thousands of lives sink in the pitiless ocean; many a bitter wail goes up from drowning crews; how wickedly cruel to have such power and to see the ship sink in the storm; how icily stony to have such power and to watch unmoved the agony of the perishing.

The prayers against the enemy are beautiful effusions; some of the children praying the All-father

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to enable them to slay his other children: "Stir up thy strength, O Lord, and come and help us." What a curious request. Does the All-strong require to stir up his strength before he can crush a few men? "Judge between us and our enemies." But suppose the enemy is in the right, what then? Suppose English sailors are on the wrong side, as in the dispute between George III. and the American Colonies, such a prayer then becomes a prayer for defeat, not an encouraging thought with which to go into battle. The prayers are also offensive for their cowardice of tone: "Let not our sins now cry against us for vengeance; but hear us thy poor servants begging mercy, and imploring thy help." The praises after victory are as objectionable as the prayers before: "The Lord hath covered our heads and made us to stand in the day of battle." And what of the poor wounded, groaning below in the cockpit, whose heads the Lord hath not covered? "The Lord hath overthrown our enemies, and dashed in pieces those that rose up against us." How thoroughly savage and bloodthirsty the thanksgiving! Is God supposed to rejoice over the sufferings of the defeated? Is he to be thanked for slaying his creatures? And then the victory is to be improved to the "advancement of thy gospel;" the gospel of so-called peace and goodwill is to be advanced by cannon-ball and torpedo, by sabre and cutlass. Truly they must believe that Jesus came to send a sword through the earth. And yet this is the true spirit of Christianity; of the creed which has shed more human blood than any other faith; of the creed which won its way through Europe with the crucifix in one hand, and the battle-axe in the other; of the creed that tortured innumerable victims on the rack, and which lit the funeral pyres of the martyrs; of the creed whose cross has ever been crimson-red, not with the blood of one who died to save humanity, but with the blood of a humanity sacrificed to the glory of God.

Ordaining Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. 9

THE FORM AND MANNER OF
MAKING, ORDAINING, AND CONSECRATING
OF
BISHOPS, PRIESTS, AND DEACONS,
ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF
THE UNITED CHURCH OF ENGLAND
AND IRELAND.

If the Church of England confined herself in her ministrations to offices which had some demonstrable effect, her occupation would be gone. These Ordination offices stand on a par with that of Confirmation. In both, the Holy Ghost is given by imposition of episcopal hands; in both, no appreciable results follow the gift. The preface to these offices says: "It is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these orders of ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons." The "evidence" of this appears doubtful, seeing that all Presbyterians acknowledge no such triple order, and regard bishops as an invention of the devil, and "the pride of prelacy" as "a rag of the scarlet" lady. The three offices before us may, to all intents and purposes, be treated as one, for they are the progressive steps of the ladder which reaches from earth to heaven, from the poor deacon-curate on 70*l.* a year at the bottom, to the archbishop luxuriating on 15,000*l.* a year at the top. There is much of solemn farce in the opening: the archdeacon presents the candidates for ordination to the bishop, and the reverend father in God, who has had them examined, who knows all about them, and has probably dined with them the night before, gravely responds: "Take heed that the persons whom ye present unto us be apt and meet, for their learning and godly conversa-

sation, to exercise their ministry duly, to the honour of God and the edifying of his Church." For the learning of some young clergymen, the less said about it the better, but those presented have at least scraped through the bishop's examination, and will not now be turned back. The question is simply a sham, and both candidates and bishop would be thoroughly astonished if the archdeacon replied that any one of them was deficient.

The Litany follows after this, and then the Communion Office, with special Collect, Epistle, and Gospel. After the Oath of Supremacy, the bishop examines the candidates for the diaconate: "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office?" is asked of each, and each answers: "I trust so." This ought to be a solemn question: to be inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost is surely an important thing; and when one remembers how very little many of these young men, fresh from college, seem to think of the matter, and how one chooses the Church because it is "gentlemanly," and another because there is a fat living in the family, and another because he is too stupid for any other profession, we can scarcely help wondering at the workings of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man. They are also asked if they "unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures." If they really do believe them at their ordination much change must take place in after life, judging by the amount of scepticism among the clergy. Much of the fault lies in pledging young men of three-and-twenty to absolute belief in what they have probably studied but little; at college all their instruction is in *Christian Evidences*, not in attacks on Christianity; they really know but little of the anti-Christian arguments, and therefore are naturally shaken when they learn them further on. Then the deacon is to read Homilies in Church, and promises to do so, although he never

Ordaining Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. 11

fulfils the promise, and he vows to obey his "Ordinary and other chief ministers of the Church . . . following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions." How well the deacons and priests keep this pledge may be seen in the daily struggles between them and their bishops, and in the necessity of passing a Public Worship Regulation Act for the easier suppression of rebellious priests. A year must intervene between the diaconate and the priesthood, and when this year has run, the youthful aspirant to the power of the keys presents himself once more before the Father in God, and the same farce of question and answer is repeated. The service runs as in that for deacons, save the special Epistle and Gospel, until after the Oath of Supremacy; and then comes a long exhortation, wherein what strikes us most is the complete contrast between the priest in theory and the priest in practice: "If it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue . . . see that you never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life." Now change the scene to six weeks later, and our young priest is playing croquet and flirting meekly with his rector's daughters, oblivious of the "horrible punishment" he is incurring from Hodge at the public-house getting drunk unrebuked. "Consider how studious ye ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures . . . and for this selfsame cause how ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies."

Alas for the special vanities of country clergymen ; this one botanizes, and that one zoologizes, and another one geologizes, and a fourth is devoted to his garden, and a fifth to his poultry, and a sixth to his farming, not to speak of those who adorn the bench of magistrates and sternly sentence wicked poachers, and sinful old women who pick up sticks, and children who steal flowers. It may be urged that no set of men could possibly live the life sketched in this exhortation : granted ; but, then, why pretend that they are bound to live it, and threaten horrible punishments if they do not perform the impossible ? Besides, the bishop expresses his hope that they have well considered the whole matter, and have “ clearly determined, by God’s grace . . . you will apply yourself wholly to this one thing, and draw all your cares and studies this way.” When the time comes to put the questions to the candidates, this very point forms one of them : “ Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh ? ” And the candidates solemnly promise to do that which they must know they have no intention of doing. One might further urge, that the perpetual meddlingness enjoined in this Office on the priest would make that individual a perfect nuisance to his parishioners if he tried to carry it into practice, and that he would probably very often find his ministrations cut short with unpleasant emphasis. The consecration follows in due course : “ Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and work of a priest in the Church of God . . . Whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven ; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.” And yet some people pretend that the Church of England does not sanction an absolving priesthood ! If these words have any meaning, they mean that the young men now

ordained have the most awful power given into their hands, that they can, in very truth, lock and unlock heaven, for by their absolution the forgiven sinner may enter, while through their retainment of his sins he may be shut out. How tremendous then is the authority thus given into hands so young and so untried. And surely such power is not to be wasted? Surely it is the duty of these priests to be continually urging people to seek, and continually to be giving absolution. Why should one sinner die unshriven, when such death may be prevented by the diligence of the priest? Life would be impossible were all this really believed; what priest could live in reasonable comfort if this were true and were realised? All earthly things would sink into insignificance, and life would become a desperate struggle to save and absolve the perishing; real belief would end its days in a lunatic asylum.

The Consecration of Archbishop or Bishop is somewhat more ceremonious, but is one in character with the preceding offices. The promise to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's word is one the fulfilment of which brings unfortunate bishops nowadays into much trouble in the flesh. For when a Colenso "comes down like a wolf on the fold," and a faithful Bishop of Oxford forbids him to tear the lambs of his flock, immediately people mutter "bigoted," "narrow-minded," "tyranny," with sundry other unpleasant adjectives and nouns. Yet can there be no doubt that he of Oxon was only obeying his ordination vow. In truth the present spirit of liberty is thoroughly at issue with the spirit of these offices, and the only effect of maintaining them is to create hypocrites and vow breakers. Nor is it fair to judge too harshly those who break these foolish vows, for a man may honestly think that he can best serve his generation as clergyman, and may have a general belief in

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Christianity, and he may then argue that he cannot permit himself to be kept out of a wide sphere of usefulness by a few obsolete vows. The pity is that men, whose common sense is too strong to be bound by foolish promises taken in ignorance in their youth, do not join earnestly together to remove this stumbling-block from before the feet of the next generation, so that, if they deem their church valuable, they may preserve her by adapting her to the realities of the nineteenth instead of the sixteenth century, and may make her services something more than a farce, her ceremonies something better than a show.

THE ARTICLES.

It is a little difficult to make out how far the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England—"the forty stripes save one"—are binding or non-binding on her members. There is, of course, no question that they accurately sketch her doctrines, and that all her faithful children should accept and believe them with devout piety, but scarcely any dogma can be enforced by law against the laity, the whole spirit of the time being directly antagonistic to such enforcement. But there is no doubt that these Articles are both legally and morally binding on the clergy, as they voluntarily submit themselves to them, and declare their full and free belief in them when entering upon the enjoyment of any benefice of the Establishment. The Royal Declaration, prefixed to the Articles, is sweeping and decisive enough. "The Articles of the Church of England do contain the true doctrine of the Church of England agreeable to God's word; which we do therefore ratify and confirm, requiring all our loving subjects to continue in the uniform profession thereof, and prohibiting the least difference from the said

Articles." After this distinct declaration we are commanded "That no man hereafter shall either print, or preach, to draw the Article aside either way, but shall submit to it in the plain and full meaning thereof; and shall not put his own sense or comment to be the meaning of the Article, but shall take it in the literal and grammatical sense." When any outsider has read this declaration it becomes to him one of the mysteries of the faith how it is that English gentlemen, honest, honourable men in everything else, manage to accept livings on condition of declaring their full concord with these Articles, and then deliberately twist them into non-natural meanings, in order that they may be Roman Catholic or Latitudinarian, according to the opinions of the readers. It may, certainly, be conceded that the "literal and grammatical sense" is very often nonsense, and therefore cannot be believed; perfectly true: but these honest men have no right to give the weight of their culture and their goodness to bolster up this falling Church, whose dogmas they can never accept, except by transfiguring their unreason into reason, and their folly into wisdom. Many who are ignorant, and careless, and uncultured are kept as nominal members of the Anglican Church because a glamour is thrown over it by the Broad Church clergy; but their position cannot be too strongly reprobated, *so long as they make no effort to alter that in which they do not believe, so long as they silently support superstitions which without their aid would, long ago, have crumbled into ruin.*

Article I. deals with "Faith in the Holy Trinity." Most creeds, certainly all Oriental creeds, cluster around a Trinity; the root of the worship of the Trinity is struck deep into the nature of man, for it is the worship of the life universal, localised in the giver of the life individual, under the symbol of the phallic emblem, the creator of each new existence. The Christian Trinity has, naturally, outgrown the

primal barbarism of Nature-worship, although preserving the Trinity in unity: "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions . . . and in unity of this Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." So far have we travelled under the guidance of the Church, and we have before our mind's eye, one God, uncorporeate, passionless, indivisible, and yet divided into three "persons," thus implying three individualities, separate the one from the other. Let us remember that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, but that since there is but one God, the Father is the Son, and the Son is the Holy Ghost, and since the Father is the same as the Son, and the Son is the same as the Holy Ghost, the Father and the Holy Ghost must necessarily be identical. Article II. teaches us that "the Son, which is the word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance;" the Son: that is, the Second Person in the undivided and indivisible Trinity: "begotten from everlasting of the Father;" but the Father is one with the Son, for both are God, and yet there is but one God, and therefore Son and Father are interchangeable terms; the Son then is begotten from everlasting of himself, for in the one true God no division is possible, and "such as the Father is such is the Son;" and further, the Son, being the Son, and at the same time identical with his own Father, takes man's nature: then the Father and the Holy Ghost must also take man's nature, for "such as the Son such is the Father, and such is the Holy Ghost:" and God, "without body," takes man's body, and "without parts" is crucified, and "without passions" suffers. But the Son dies "to reconcile his Father to us;" but he is his Father, and his

Father is himself. Can the one living and true God die to reconcile himself to himself, and to offer himself up a sacrifice to himself to appease his own wrath? The bodiless is nailed on the cross: the impassible suffers: the undying dies: the one God on earth is offered to appease the one God in heaven, and there is but one living and true God. If this be so, either the God in heaven or the God on earth must have been a false God, for there is but one true God: and the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who must be kept indivisible in thought, hang upon the cross, as a sacrifice to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and cry, being the one true God, to "my God, my God" who has forsaken himself. And all this "to reconcile the Father to us:" the Father who is "without passions," and who therefore cannot be angry or need reconciliation. "As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also it is to be believed that he went down into hell." *Down* into hell; which way is down from a round globe? In the ancient conception of the universe the earth was flat, with heaven above and hell underneath, and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, when the earth opened her mouth, "went down quick (alive) into hell:" did Jesus do the same? But, hanging on the cross, he said to the penitent thief: "*To-day* shalt thou be with me in Paradise:" is Paradise the same hell? and is heaven identical with both? Jesus ascended, went up, not down, to heaven: if this be so, might not some confusion arise on the way, for a soul starting downwards from Australia on its way to hell, might be found soaring upwards from England after a few hours' journey. Are heaven and hell both all round the world, and if so, why is one "up" and the other "down"? Rome was right and wise when she set her face sternly against the heliocentric theory; a revolving globe destroys all the old notions of the "heaven above," and of "the water under the earth," and of hell below; and it was a strong argument

against the sphericity of the earth that "in the day of judgment, men on the other side of a globe could not see the Lord descending through the air." The Fourth Article teaches us that Christ "took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature; *wherewith* he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth." Body, flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to man's nature; wishes, and appetites, and needs, heart and lungs, for instance; and he took these beyond the atmosphere? lungs to breathe where no air is? heart to pulse where no oxygen can purify the blood? flesh and bones among pure spirits? the form of man sitting on the throne of God? and this flesh, bones, &c., all one with the indivisible, from the God without body and parts, and Jesus the Son of Mary, the crucified man, sitting in his flesh and bones in heaven, not to be separated in thought from the one living and true God, without body, parts, or passions.* Such is the "literal and grammatical sense" of the first four Articles, and to analyse the Fifth, "of the Holy Ghost," would be simply to repeat all that has been said above, since "such is the Son, such is the Holy Ghost." May it not justly be said that belief in the Trinity in Unity is the negation of thought, and that faith is only possible where reason ends?

Article VI. deals with "the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation," and lays down the Canon that anything not capable of proof from the Bible must not be "required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." The converse of this proposition, that dogmas that can be proved therefrom are necessary to salvation, is said not to be binding on the Church, and some notable "depravers" of the Scriptures have successfully slipped through this Article. The list of books given as those "of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church"

* 1 Cor. xv. 50.

seems open to grave objections, as the authority of many of the books now accounted canonical has been distinctly challenged. "The history of Jonah is so monstrous that it is absolutely incredible." "Job spake not therefore as it stands written in his book." "Isaiah hath borrowed his whole art and knowledge from David." Thus, among many other staid criticisms, wrote Luther. To go further back, is to find much sharp challenging. The Epistle to the Hebrews is of most doubtful authenticity. The 2nd Epistle of Peter and that of Jude are debateable. The Revelation of St. John the Divine was very slowly received, and the two shorter Epistles which bear his name are dubiously recognised. If only the books are to be received of which there "was never any doubt in the Church," the canonical list must be shorn of most of its ornaments. When Article VII. tells us that the ceremonial and civil precepts of the Old Testament are not binding upon us, it seems a pity that some test is not given whereby unlearned people may be able to distinguish between the "Commandments which are called moral" and the others. Is the command to persecute non-believers in Jehovah (Deut. xiii., xvii. 2—7) binding to-day? Is the command to put Witches to death (Lev. xx. 27) binding to-day? John Wesley said that belief in witchcraft was incumbent on all those who believed the Bible, and if witchcraft was possible then why not now? or has God changed his mind as to the proper method of dealing with such persons? Are the commands enjoining and regulating Slavery (Ex. xxi. 2—6, and 20, 21; Lev. xxv. 44—46; Deut. xv. 12—18) intended for the guidance of slave-holders to-day? What is there to make the "Commandments which are called moral"—by which we may presume are meant the Ten Commandments—more binding on "Christian men" than the other parts of the law? The Fourth Commandment

is essentially a Jewish one, and is not obeyed among Christians. The Second Commandment is invariably ignored, and the Fifth promises a reward which is not given. The Commandments touching murder, adultery, stealing, lying are not peculiar to the Mosaic code. They are found in all moral legislation, and are binding—not because taught by Moses or by Buddha, but—because their observance is necessary to the existence of society. Of the three Creeds of the Church we have already spoken, so pass to Article IX., “of Original or Birth-sin.” It seems that a fault and corruption of Nature are naturally “engendered of the offspring of Adam,” and that this fault “in every person born into the world deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.” That seems scarcely fair, since the infant’s consent is not asked before he is born into the world, and the fault of being born is, therefore, none of his. How, then, can the babe *deserve* God’s wrath and damnation? And seeing that the very next Article (X.) informs us that our condition is such that a man “cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God,” it appears terribly unjust that either child or man should be held accursed because they do not do what God has made them incapable of doing. It would be as reasonable to torture a man for not flying without wings, as for God to punish man for being born of the race of Adam, and for not turning to God when the power so to do is withheld; for “we have *no power to do good works* without the grace of God by Christ,” and when that grace is not given we lie helpless and strengthless, unable to do right. Nor can any deed of ours make us fit recipients of the grace of God, for (Article XIII.) “works done before the grace of Christ and the Inspiration of his Spirit *are not pleasant* to God neither do they make men meet to receive grace yea, rather, for that they

are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, *we doubt not but that they have the nature of sin.*" So that if a good and noble heathen, who has never heard of Christ, and whose good deeds cannot therefore "spring of faith in Jesus Christ," does some high-minded action, or shows some kindly charity, his good deeds are of "the nature of sin," and in fact make him rather worse off than he was before: as Melancthon said, his virtues are only "splendid vices" because done without faith in a person of whom he has never heard. For (Art. XVIII.) they "are to be had accursed that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature:" "we are accounted righteous before God (Art. XI.) *only* for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and *not for our own works and deservings.*" Thus we learn that God cares not for righteousness of life, but only for blind faith, and that he sends us out into a world lying under his curse, without any chance of salvation except by attaining a faith which he gives or withholds at his pleasure, and which we can of ourselves do nothing to deserve, much less to obtain. To crown this beautiful theory we learn,—Article XVII. "of Predestination and Election:"—predestination to life, it seems, "is the everlasting purpose of God whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour." But if this be true, man has no choice of any kind in the matter; for not only is grace to do right the gift of God, but man's acceptance of the gift is also compulsory. God has arranged, before he made the world, how many and whom he will save. What, then, becomes of man's

boasted free will? Before the creation God drew the plan of every human life, and as the potter moulds the ductile clay into the shape he desires, so God moulds his human pottery after his own will into "vessels made to salvation" or made to dishonour. To talk of man's freedom is a mockery. What freedom had Adam and Eve in Paradise? "They might have stood:" nay; for was not "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world?" Before the sin was committed God had made the atonement for it. If Adam were free not to sin, then it would be possible that he might not have sinned, and then God would have offered a needless sacrifice, and would have a Saviour with no one to save, so that it would have been necessary to provide a sinner in order to utilise the sacrifice. All idea of justice is here hideously impossible; God has predestinated some human beings *out of mankind*. These "in due season" he calls; "through grace they obey the calling;" "they be justified freely . . . and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity." And the rest—those who are *not* predestined; those who are *not* called; those to whom *no* grace is given; those who are *not* justified freely; those who have no God's mercy to aid them;—what of them? Made by God, the creatures of his hand, the vessels of his moulding, the clay of his shaping, are they cast into the lake of brimstone, into the fire that never shall be quenched, simply because God in "his sovereignty" put them—unconscious—under his curse and left them there, adding to the cruelty of creation the more savage cruelty of preservation? No! whether such deeds should be wrought by God or man, they would be wickedly wrong. Almighty power is no excuse for crime, and the God of the Articles of the Church of England is a gigantic criminal, who uses his Almightiness to make life that he may torment it, and to create sentient beings foredoomed to bitterest

agony, to keenest woe. Such frightful misuse of power can only meet with strongest reprobation from all moral beings; unlimited power turned to evil purposes may trample us under its feet, crushed into helplessness, but it can never force us to worship, it can never compel us to adore.

These first eighteen Articles of the Church may be said to contain the more salient points of the Church's teaching, and it is needless to point out the utter impossibility of reasonable and gentle-hearted men and women believing in the "plan of salvation" sketched out in them. They are instinct with the cruel theology of Calvin and of Zwingli, and imply (though they do not so plainly word) the view of the Lambeth Articles of 1595, that "God from eternity hath predestinated certain men unto life; *certain he hath reprobated.*" These Anglican Articles must be taken as teaching predestination to damnation as well as to salvation, since those not called to life must inevitably fall to death. The next section—so to speak—of the Articles deals with Church affairs, defining the authority of Churches and of Councils, and explaining the doctrine of the Sacraments. It is with these that the High Church party chiefly fall out, for the Twenty-first Article, acknowledging that General Councils may err and have erred, strikes at the root of the infallibility of the Church Universal, so dear to the priestly soul. The Articles on the Sacraments also tend somewhat to the Low Church view of them, and dwell more on the faith of the recipient than on the consecration of the priest. The Article (XXXIII.) levelled against "excommunicate persons," commanding that such an one shall "be taken of the whole multitude of the faithful, as an Heathen and Publican, until he be openly reconciled by penance," is duly believed and subscribed by clergymen, but has no real meaning to-day. If the Thirty-fifth Article were acted upon, some curiosities of English literature

would enliven the Churches; for this Article bids the clergy read the Homilies: "we judge them to be read in Churches by the Ministers, diligently and distinctly, that they may be understood of the people." It is really a pity that this direction is not carried out, for some of the barbarous doctrines of popular Christianity would then be seen as they are described by men who thoroughly believed in them, instead of being known only as they are presented to us to-day, with some of their deformity hidden under the robes woven for them by modern civilisation, wherein humanity has outgrown the old Christianity, and men's reason chastens their faith. The last three Articles touch on civil matters, acknowledging the Royal Supremacy and dealing with other matters pertaining to Cæsar, but on the borderland between him and God.

Such are the Articles of the Church; believed by few, unknown to many, winked at by all, because religion is practically a matter of indifference to most, and while custom and fashion enforce conformity with the Church, the brain troubles not itself to analyse the claim, or to weigh the conditions of allegiance. Men have become so sceptical as to regard all creeds with indifference, and the half-conceived unbelief of the clergy, signing with mental reservations, and formally asserting belief where the thought and the lips are at variance, appears to have eaten the heart out of all religious honesty in England, and men lie to God who would revolt at lying to man. If belief in the Articles is now a thing of the past, then the Articles themselves should also pass away; if Churchmen have outgrown these dogmas, why do they suffer them to deface their Prayer-Book, to barb "the shafts of the sceptic, and to give power to the sneer of the scoffer?"

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